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SPECIMENS OF GREEK TRAGEDY



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SPECIMENS

OF

GREEK TRAGEDY

TRANSLATED BY

GOLDWIN SMITH, D.C.L.

EURIPIDES

New York
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1.

EURIPIDES

1



MEDEA.

JASON, sent out to fetch from Colchis the golden fleece, which was guarded by an ever-watchful dragon, owed his life to the enchantments of Medea, daughter of the King of Colchis, who had fallen in love with him. He marries her, brings her back with him to Hellas, and has two children by her. But he casts her off for the sake of a more ambitious marriage with Glauce, daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. Medea, fired with vengeance, destroys by her magic drugs Glauce and Creon, kills her own two children by Jason, then flies away in a car drawn by dragons.

Medea opens her griefs to the Chorus. There follows a dialogue between her and Creon, whom she cajoles into respiting her for one day from the sentence of banishment which he passes upon her as an enemy of the marriage.

MEDEA.

THE ENEMY CAJOLED.

LINES 213-408.

MEDEA.

Ladies of Corinth, I have come abroad¹
Lest I give umbrage ; many a one is taxed
With haughtiness, some for their privacy,
Some for their public port ; while quiet souls
Are scorned as indolent and spiritless.
For justice lives not in the eyes of men,
Who, ere they probe the secret of the heart,
Hate at first sight him who has done no wrong.
Strangers must bend them to the country's ways,
Nor would I praise e'en natives whose self-will
Defies the public taste unmannerly.
But this unlooked-for blow that falls on me.
O'erwhelms my soul, and, for my broken heart
Life, ladies, has no charm ; I long for death.
My husband he, that was my all, has proved,
As is well known to you, the worst of men.
Of all the creatures that have life and sense,

¹ Seclusion was the general state of the Hellenic women.

We women are most hapless, since we needs
 Must buy a husband, and, what still is worse,
 In him must take a master of ourselves.
 Upon his character our all depends ;
 Divorce for woman is no easy thing,
 Nor can she rid her of her mate at will ;
 And when one comes to ways and tempers new,
 Unless well warned, one must a prophet be
 To guess the humours of one's bed-fellow.
 If to reward one's diligence in this,
 A husband prove a gentle yoke-fellow,
 Our life is pleasant, else 'twere best to die.
 The man, when he is weary of his home,
 Can leave it, and refresh his soul abroad,
 By converse with a friend or company,
 But we must look for happiness to one.
 They tell us that the woman lives at home
 In safety, while the husband wars abroad ;
 Unjustly, for I liefer thrice would stand
 In battle under shield than bring forth once.
 But I forget that my case is not yours.
 You have a country here, you have a home,
 The joys of life, and the kind words of friends,
 While I am desolate, from a strange land
 Brought by the man who tramples on me now,
 Without a mother, brother, kinsman here
 To be my haven in adversity.
 One thing I have of your good-will to ask, •
 Which is that, should I any means devise
 Of vengeance on the man who wrongs me thus,

And on his new wife's sire and his new wife,
Ye keep my secret. Woman is not brave,
She dares not face the iron front of war ;
But let her right and honour as a wife
Be touched, and bloodier mind is none than hers.

CHORUS.

Medea, I will do it ; thou hast cause
For thy revenge. Well may thy heart be stung.
But yonder comes the master of this land,
Creon, some new decision to announce.

(Enter CREON.)

CREON.

Thee of the sour aspect, thy husband's foe,
Medea, I command from this our realm,
To go forth banished with thy children twain,
And on the instant. I am master here,
And will not to my palace turn again,
Till I have cast thee forth from our confines.

MEDEA.

I am undone, am utterly undone,
Our enemy spreads all his sail in chase,
And harbour none of refuge is at hand.
Yet I demand, down trodden as I am,
Creon, to know why thou dost banish me.

CREON.

Because I fear thee, simple truth to say ;
Thou'lt do some deadly mischief to my child.

To make me think this many things conspire ;
Cunning is thine, thou'rt mistress of black arts,
And stung by having lost thy bed-fellow ;
And thou dost threaten, so report gives out,
Against the bride, her father, and her mate,
Something to do. Forewarned I am forearmed.
Better it is now to confront thy hate,
Than mercy show which I shall some day rue.

MEDEA.

Not now alone, Creon, but many a time
Has this false reputation been my bane.
No man of sense will send his sons to school
Where they will learn to be exceeding wise ;
Decried as pedant drones, they will to boot
Become the common mark of jealousy.
For when you bring new truth to vulgar minds,
They deem you not wise, but unpractical,
While those who on deep learning pride themselves
Are piqued, and you incur the general hate ;
This have I bitter cause myself to know.
My wisdom makes me opposite to some,
By others envied. Yet 'tis not so vast.
You fear some unkind treatment at my hands.
Fear nothing, Creon ; think not I am one
Profane enough to strike at majesty.
How hast thou wronged me ? Thou hast given thy
child
To wife as pleased thee. I my husband hate
'Tis true. But what was done by thee was wise.

I grudge not, I, your house's happiness ;
Marry and prosper. Only suffer me
To keep my dwelling here ; wronged though we be,
Knowing our weakness we shall hold our peace.

CREON.

Thy words are soft enough, but much I fear
That evil thoughts may breed in thy dark soul.
I more than ever do mistrust thee now.
The passionate, be they of either sex,
Are not so dangerous as the calm and deep.
But get thee hence ! spin out discourse no more.
It is resolved, and thou hast no device
To keep thee here, now that thou art my foe.

MEDEA.

Nay, by thy knees I pray thee, by the bride.

CREON.

Thou dost but waste thy words ; my purpose holds.

MEDEA.

Wilt thou expel me, reckless of my prayer ?

CREON.

I will ; I love my household more than thee.

MEDEA.

Alas ! my country, would thou still wert mine.

CREON.

To me my land is, next my children, dear.

MEDÆA.

Alas ! what evils does love bring on men.

CREON.

It may, or it may not, as chance ordains.

MEDÆA.

Zeus, look upon the author of these woes.

CREON.

Fool, get thee hence, and let our troubles end.

MEDÆA.

Trouble enow ! Think not I crave for more.

CREON.

My servants soon will drag thee hence by force.

MEDÆA.

Have mercy on me, Creon, hear my prayer.

CREON.

Thou'rt bent on giving trouble, as it seems.

MEDÆA.

I will go hence ; it was not that I craved.

CREON.

Why dost thou prate, then, and not quit the land ?

MEDEA.

Permit me here to bide for this one day,
And to bethink me whither I shall flee,
And where for my poor children shelter find,
Whose father cares not to provide for them.
Have pity, Creon, on my little ones.
Thy heart is with me ; thou hast children too.
Little I reckon of my own banishment,
'Tis for my children that my soul is grieved.

CREON.

There is in me nothing tyrannical ;
Full oft have I shown mercy to my loss.
And, lady, now I know that I do wrong,
Yet will I grant thy prayer ; only be warned
That if to-morrow's rising sun shall find
Thee and thy children lingering in this land,
Thou diest. As I have said, it shall be done.
But thou hast leave to tarry this one day,
In which thou scarce would do that which I fear.

(*Exit* CREON.)

CHORUS.

Hapless lady, child of woe,
Whither, whither canst thou go,
To what land or dwelling flee,
Where find hospitality?
Sorrow, rife on every side,
Whelms Medea with its tide.

MEDEA.

All so far has gone ill, that is the truth ;
But this, I'd have thee know, is not the end.
A dangerous hour still waits the bridal pair ;
There's work for those that gave the bride away.
Think ye that I would cringe to yonder lord,
Save as an artifice to gain my end ?
I would not speak to him, nor touch his hand.
But he is so far lost to common sense,
When by expelling me he might have cut
My plottings short, to let me bide this day,
In which I shall despatch three enemies,
My husband, and the bride, and the bride's sire.
More ways than one I have of slaying them,
And am in doubtful mind which way to take.
Shall I set fire unto the bride-chamber ?
Or shall I steal up to the nuptial bed,
And plunge my whetted sword into her heart ?
One peril meets me here : if I be caught
Passing the door with murderous intent,
I die, a triumph for my enemies.
The nearest way is best ; in use of drugs
I am expert ; drugs then shall do my work.
Well !
Suppose them dead, where will my city be ?
My house of refuge, my asylum where ?
What friend will give protection to my life ?
None. I will tarry then a little time,
And if a coign of safety I can find,

Stealthily and by craft I'll do this deed.
But if to tarry is impossible,
With desperate hand I will unsheathe the sword,
And smite them, though the forfeit be my life.
I swear by Hecate, my patroness
And fellow-worker, whom I most adore,
Whose shrine is at my hearth, that all of them
Who make my heart to bleed shall rue the day ;
Doleful and dark their bridal hour shall be,
Ill-starred the bond sealed by my banishment.
Come on, Medea, prove thy utmost skill,
Task the invention of thy plotting brain,
Brace thee to murder now ; thy nerve is tried.
Think what thou art ; child of a noble sire,
Sprung from the sun, the scorn thou must not be
Of Sisyphus's race and Jason's bride.
The way is known to thee, and womankind,
Though helpless for all purposes of good,
In evil machinations have no peer.

THE PERFIDIOUS HUSBAND.

Jason tries to defend his conduct to Medea. An altercation ensues.

LINES 445-626.

JASON.

I see, and many a time before have seen,
The havoc that ungoverned passion makes.

Thou mightst have kept thy country and thy home,
Hadst thou but bowed to the behests of power.
That foolish tongue has wrought thy banishment.
To me it matters naught. Cry without end
That Jason is the vilest of mankind ;
But for thy railings against royalty
Thou'rt lucky to be quit with banishment.
For my part, long I strove the royal ire
To soothe, and gladly would have kept thee here.
But still thy folly rails against the king,
And this it is that drives thee from the land.
Yet have I not discarded those I loved,
But, lady, have come hither to provide
That thou and thine go not forth penniless,
Nor lacking aught. For exile in its train
Brings many a hardship. Hate me if thou wilt ;
I never can renounce my love for thee.

MEDEA.

Thou caitiff, if my hand cannot chastise,
My tongue shall brand thee with that note of shame.
And thou art here, worst of my enemies !
It is not manly fortitude to look
The friend whom thou hast injured in the face,
But shamelessness, of human maladies
The most abhorred. However, thou dost well
In coming here. I shall relieve my soul
By utterance of my wrongs, and punish thee.
From the beginning to take up the tale,
I saved thy life, as all thy countrymen

That in the Argo sailed, will testify,
When thou wast sent to bring beneath the yoke
The fiery bulls and sow the deadly field.
The dragon, too, that kept the golden fleece
Unsleeping, with his many coils, I slew,
And bade the light of safety dawn for thee.
I left my father and my father's house,
And to Iolcos, Pelion's town, I fled
With thee, wherein I showed more heart than brain.
Pelias I slew ; I slew him by the hands
Of his own children, and dispelled thy fear.
This have I done for thee, and thou, base man,
Hast cast me off, and wedded a new wife,
Though thou hadst children. Childless if thou wert,
It were less crime to seek a fruitful bed.
Thy oaths have vanished ; thou dost think, it seems,
Either that those old gods have ceased to reign,
Or that new laws have place among mankind.
Thou know'st thou ill hast kept thy oath to me.
Alas ! for my right hand so often grasped,
And for my knees that by those caitiff lips
So oft were pressed, how are our hopes belied !
Should I hold converse with thee as a friend,
Or look for any service at thy hand ?
And yet, to shame thee, I will question thee.
Whither can I betake me, to that home
Which, and my fatherland, I left for thee,
Or to King Pelias' daughters ? Kind would be
Their welcome of their father's murderess.
Such is my case ; from those of my own house

I am estranged, and those whom I have wronged,
All for thy sake, are now my enemies.
Which to requite, thou now art making me
Envied of Hellas, hapless that I am.
A wondrous faithful spouse I have in thee,
If from this land I am to be cast out
Friendless, and with my children desolate.
Thy saviour and thy children sent to roam
As beggars, nobly grace thy marriage hour.
Zeus, thou hast given to men a certain test
Whereby to tell the bad gold from the good :
Why hast thou not set on the human face
A stamp to warn us against wickedness?

CHORUS.

Fierce is the strife, and passing hard to heal,
When hearts once knit by friendship meet in wrath.

JASON.

It seems I must not fail in eloquence,
But, like the skilful helmsman of a barque,
With sails close reefed, must deftly edge away,
Good lady, from this squall of angry words.
I say, since thou dost pile thy claim so high,
That my successful voyage was due to none
In earth or heaven, except the Queen of Love.
Thy mind is keen, and somewhat gross it were
To tell at length how love constrained thee
With his unerring bow this form to save.
On that I will not curiously dwell ;

Whate'er the motive, a good deed was done.
But for the preservation of my life
Thou wast repaid and more, as I will show.
For, first, thou hast exchanged a barbarous land
For Hellas, and hast come where justice rules,
And where the law, not brutal force, prevails ;
Then thou art by all Hellenes known as wise,
And famous is thy name ; while, didst thou live
At the world's end, thy name would ne'er be heard.
Not though my house were full of hoarded gold,
Though I were more than Orpheus' peer in song,
Could I be happy in obscurity.
So much of my adventures I have said
Since thou didst challenge me ; there let it rest.
But for this marriage which thou dost revile,
I'll prove to thee that herein I was wise,
Unmoved by lust, and most considerate
To thee and to thy children. Do not start.
When I came hither from the Iolcian land
Training a load of disadvantages,
What better fortune could have fallen to me,
An exile, than to find a royal bride.
'Twas not that, as thy jealousy conceives,
Wearied of thee, I longed for a new love,
Nor that I sighed for numerous progeny ;
No, I am well content with that I have.
My first desire was to advance my state,
And win me opulence, for well I know
That poverty soon forfeits all its friends ;
My next to rear my children worthily.

Unto thy boys I might have brothers given,
And as the common head of two fair lines
Been happy ; thou couldst no more children need
Than those thou hast, who would through those to come
Have prospered. Was I so impolitic ?
Thou wouldst not think so but for jealousy.
But this it is. So long as in your bed
Ye are not touched, you women are content ;
But touch you there, and excellence itself
Will not escape your mortal enmity.
'Twere well if we could find some other way
To propagate, and women were no more ;
Then should the life of man be rid of ills.

CHORUS.

Jason, thy pleading has been eloquent,
Yet must I hold, albeit it please thee not,
In leaving a true wife thou didst amiss.

MEDEA.

In much I am at variance with my kind.
On him who argues well in a bad cause,
Trusting his eloquence to dress his deed,
I would inflict a double penalty ;
He boldly sins, yet is not truly wise.
And thou — a truce to thy hypocrisy
And cunning tricks. One word would quash thy plea
Were honesty thy rule. With my consent
Thou wouldst have wedded, not clandestinely.

JASON.

And well thou wouldst have furthered my intent
Had I consulted thee, who even now
Canst not repress the fury of thy soul.

MEDEA.

Nay, that was not thy trouble, in thine age
Thou wert ashamed of thy barbarian wife.

JASON.

Rest thou assured, passion was not the cause
Of this my union with a royal maid.
Thy welfare, as I told thee, was the cause,
And my desire to blend a princely race
With mine, and thus our house to fortify.

MEDEA.

No happy-seeming misery be mine,
No wealth that would bring anguish to my soul.

JASON.

Wouldst thou not wish for a far wiser change?
Dream not that what is good can be thy bane,
Or thyself hapless amidst happiness.

MEDEA.

Mock on ! for thee a haven is at hand,
While I go forth to exile desolate.

JASON.

Thyself would have it so. Blame no one else.

MEDEA.

How? Did I cast thee off, and wed again?

JASON.

Thou didst with impious lips curse majesty.

MEDEA.

And am I therefore to thy house a curse?

JASON.

Of this I hold no parley with thee more.
If thou, as aid and comfort in thy flight,
For thee and thine, aught that I have dost crave,
Say but the word, freely I'll give it thee,
With tokens that shall open friendly doors.
This to refuse were madness on thy part.
Dismiss thy wrath ; thou wilt the better fare.

MEDEA.

No friend of thine shall see me at his door,
Nothing thou offerest will I stoop to take.
The gifts of villainy are profitless.

JASON.

Then do I call the gods to witness here,
That I would fain do well by thee and thine,

But thy self-will refuses, and repels
Thy friend to thy own cost, as thou wilt learn.

MEDEA.

Begone ; thy lust for thy new-married wife
Will prick thee if thou lingerest out of doors.
Wed an it please thee ; but, so help me, Heaven,
Thou yet perchance may wish thyself unwed.

THE PLAN OF REVENGE.

Medea, having been promised an asylum by Ægeus, King of Athens, reveals her design to the Chorus.

LINES 764-823.

MEDEA.

O Zeus, O Justice, child of Zeus, O Sun,
Now shall we win a glorious victory
Over our foes ; my foot is on the path.
Now will revenge on those I hate be mine,
Now my worst fear of wreck is o'er. This prince
Has proved the haven of my policy,
Where I shall find safe anchorage for my barque,
City of Pallas, turning to thy walls.
Now will I open to you my designs,
Whereat look not to smile. I mean to send
A messenger to Jason, praying him

That he will deign once more to meet me here,
 And when he comes I will bespeak him fair,
 For so my policy requires, and crave
 That he will let me leave my children here ;
 Not that I mean my little ones to leave
 Among their unfriends, to be trampled on,
 But that I may by craft the princess slay.
 For I will send them to the bride with gifts
 To purchase my release from banishment,
 A robe of tissue rare and wreath of gold,
 Which if the damsel once put on, she dies,
 And all who touch her die in agony,
 With drugs so fell will I anoint those gifts.
 Of this enough is said, and I pass on.
 That which comes next it wrings my heart to tell.
 To kill my children is my fixed intent ;
 From that resolve no power shall make me swerve.
 Then having filled with slaughter Jason's house,
 I bid this land farewell, a murderess,
 The blood of my own children on my hands,
 But not the mock and scorn of enemies.
 Fatal to me the day on which I left
 My fatherland, lured by the wiles of one
 From Hellas, who shall yet the forfeit pay.
 His children borne by me he shall behold
 No more, nor ever shall beget a child
 On this new wife of his, for she must die
 Most piteously by my poison slain.
 Let no one deem me weak and cowardly,
 Nor tamely patient ; all will find in me

A faithful friend, a formidable foe.
Such are the spirits on which glory waits.

CHORUS.

Since thou dost take me as thy confidant,
For thy own good, and in respect for law,
I do conjure thee not to do this deed.

MEDEA.

It must be done ; but for thy kind advice
I blame thee not ; thou art not wronged like me.

CHORUS.

And canst thou slay the offspring of thy womb?

MEDEA.

That is the way to stab my husband's heart.

CHORUS.

Stabbing thy husband's heart thou wring'st thy own.

MEDEA.

I reckon not : all this talk is vain delay.
Go thou to Jason, bid him come to me ;
To thy fidelity I wholly trust,
See that thou breathe no word of my intent,
As thou art loyal to me, and a woman.

THE FEIGNED RECONCILIATION.

Medea inveigles Jason by pretended submission and reconciliation. She then puts the fatal gifts in the hands of the children to be carried to the royal bride.

LINES 866-975.

JASON.

Thy message brings me here. Despite thy hate
My duty shall in every point be done.
Tell me what thou wouldst have, I will give ear.

MEDEA.

Jason, I pray, for what was said erewhile
Forgive me. Well thou may'st excuse hot words
From one so long the partner of thy love.
Know that I have held parley with my heart
And chid myself: "Medea, why so mad,
Why so incensed with those that mean thy good,
Why brave the anger of thy sovereign
And of thy husband, who for thee does best
In marrying high and in begetting sons
Brethren for thine? Put off this wrathful coil.
Why be so graceless when the gods are kind?
Hast thou not children? Is not banishment
Thy lot, and have not exiles need of friends?"
Pondering these things, I saw that I had erred
Most grossly, and been angry without cause.

I do recant and hold thee good and wise
In forming this new tie, myself a fool.
I should have been the partner of thy plan,
Have sped the wooing, stood beside the bed,
And deemed it joy to wait upon the bride.
But women must be women ; I forbear.
Ill 'twould become thee to be like the bad,
And vie in folly with our foolishness.
I yield, and do confess that I have erred,
But I have turned to better counsels now.
Make haste, my children, from the house come forth ;
With me embrace your father, speak to him,
And like your mother, doff the form of hate,
And don the sweet look of returning love.
Take your dear father by the hand. Ah me !
I have a secret trouble in my heart.
Will ye live long, sweet babes, thus to stretch out
Your pretty arms ? Alas ! how weak am I !
How full of qualms ! My tears how apt to start !
This reconciliation, after long dispute,
Has made the sluices of my eyes o'erflow.

CHORUS.

From my eyes, too, the tears begin to stream.
Heaven grant the evil may no further go.

JASON.

I now commend thee and excuse the past.
Anger may well be pardoned in thy sex
When husbands wed again for policy.

But o'er thy heart a happy change has come,
And thou hast the more prudent cause discerned,
Proving thereby, though late, that thou art wise.
For you too, children, has your father made
A good provision ; so it please the gods,
I look to see you Corinth's foremost men,
With brothers whom I mean to get for you.
Grow up and prosper. Of all else your sire
And the propitious gods will have a care.
Some day may I behold you lusty youths,
Victorious o'er your father's enemies.
Medea, what is this? What mean those tears?
And those pale cheeks which thou dost strive to hide?
Does anything in my discourse mislike thee?

MEDEA.

It was but thinking of my children here.

JASON.

Be of good cheer ; I will take care of them.

MEDEA.

I will be of good cheer and trust thy words ;
But woman is herself, and prone to tears.

JASON.

How should the children give thee cause to weep?

MEDEA.

I love them, and in wishing them long life
Thought sadly that their life might not be long.

We of the subjects of our conference
With part have dealt, now to the rest I turn.
Since royalty decrees my banishment,
And better 'tis for me, I do confess,
Not to dwell near to those that rule and thee,
Offensive, as one deemed an enemy,
I am prepared to rid this land of me.
But that my children may enjoy thy care,
Pray Creon not to drive them from their home.

JASON.

I will essay, with what success I doubt.

MEDEA.

Pray thy new consort to entreat her sire
Not to cast forth my children from the land.

JASON.

I will ; and if she has a woman's heart,
I doubt not she will listen to my prayer.

MEDEA.

In this thy enterprise I'll lend thee aid ;
For I will send her gifts, the like of which
Full well I know the world cannot produce,
A robe of tissue rare and golden wreath
Borne by my children. Some attendant go
And bring the treasures hither with all speed.
The bride's good fortune will be multiplied,
For she will have a hero for her mate,

And will possess the bravery which the Sun
My father's father to his offspring gave.

(ATTENDANT *brings in the robe and wreath.*)

Take, children, these rich offerings in your hands,
Bear them to her that in a happy hour
Becomes a wife ; she will not find them mean.

JASON.

Thou art misguided so to rob thyself.
Think'st thou that in the palace there is lack
Of robes or gold? Keep these things for thyself ;
My princess, if she holds me dear, will care
For my entreaties more than for thy bribes.

MEDEA.

Nay, nay ; they tell you gifts with gods prevail ;
Gold can do more than floods of eloquence.
Hers is the hour. Her the gods prosper now.
She's new to grandeur : I would give not gold
But life, to save these babes from banishment.
Go, little ones, to yonder princely halls,
And on your knees beseech your father's bride,
My mistress, to prevent your banishment.
Presenting these rich gifts, see without fail
You put them in the royal lady's hand.
Go, make good speed, and come again to bring
Your mother happy tidings of success.

THE INJURED WIFE'S RESOLVE.

Medea bids the Pædagogos of her children lead them away; after a soliloquy of agonised doubt, she makes up her mind to kill them.

LINES 1002-1080.

PÆDAGOGOS.

Lady, thy sons shall not be banished hence.
The royal lady has received the gifts
Most graciously, and peace henceforth shall reign.

MEDEA.

Ha !

PÆDAGOGOS.

Why dost thou look so wild when all goes well?

MEDEA.

Ah me ! Ah me !

PÆDAGOGOS.

This little tallies with the news I bring.

MEDEA.

Ah me ! again I say.

PÆDAGOGOS.

Can I mistake
The import of my news? Is it not good?

MEDEA.

That's as may hap. I find no fault with thee.

PÆDAGOGOS.

Why, then, dost thou hang down thy head and weep?

MEDEA.

Old man, I cannot help it. This the gods
And my fell resolution brought to pass.

PÆDAGOGOS.

Fear not ; thy sons will bring thee home again.

MEDEA.

Alas ! ere that I shall bring others home.

PÆDAGOGOS.

Not thou alone of mothers art bereaved.
Such is the lot of mortals ; bear it well.

MEDEA.

So will I do. Now get thee to the house,
Make ready for my sons their daily fare.
O children, children, you a country have,
A home in which ye shall forever dwell,
Dissevered from my love and motherless.
I go, an exile, to a distant land
Before I have enjoyed your happiness.

Helped with a mother's hand to deck your brides,
And held the nuptial torch and blessed the bed.
Wretched am I in this my stern resolve.
In vain, my children, have I brought ye up,
Borne all the cares and pangs of motherhood,
And the sharp pains of childbirth undergone.
In you, alas, was treasured many a hope
Of loving sustentation in my age,
Of tender laying out when I was dead,
Such as all men might envy. Those sweet thoughts
Are mine no more ; for now bereft of you
I must wear out a drear and joyless life,
And you will never more your mother see,
Nor live as ye have done beneath her eye.
Alas ! my sons, why do you gaze on me,
Why smile upon your mother that last smile ?
Ah me ! what shall I do ? My purpose melts
Beneath the bright looks of my little ones.
I cannot do it. Farewell, my resolve.
I will bear off my children from this land.
Why should I seek to wring their father's heart
When that same act will doubly wring my own ?
I will not do it. Farewell, my resolve.
What has come o'er me ? Shall I let my foes
Triumph, that I may let my friends go free ?
I'll brace me to the deed. Base that I was
To let a thought of weakness cross my soul.
Children, go home. Whoso accounts it wrong
To be attendant at my sacrifice,
Let him stand off ; my purpose is unchanged.

Forego thy resolution, O my soul,
Force not the parent's hand to slay the child.
Their presence where we go will gladden thee.
By the avengers that in Hades reign,
It never shall be said that I have left
My children for my foes to trample on.
It is decreed. Escape from it is none.
The wreath is on the lady's head, the robe
Of death enfolds her now, that know I well.
Ere I set forth on my most piteous path
To send these babes on one more piteous still,
I'll speak to them once more. Give your right hands
My children, to your mother to embrace.
Dear hands and lips beloved by me, O forms
And faces that bespeak nobility,
Blessed may ye be. — But there — all here your sire
Has rent away from you. O dear embrace,
O soft skin of my children, O sweet breath,
Begone, for I can look on you no more.
Of what I do the wickedness I see.
Wrath over conscience has the mastery,
Wrath, that prime source of evil to mankind.

MEDEA'S REVENGE.

A Messenger relates to Medea and the Chorus the fearful end of the Princess Glauce and her father Creon.

LINES 1116-1230.

MEDEA.

Good ladies, I have long been on the watch,
To see what course events would take within,
And here comes one of Jason's serving men,
Whose panting shows him bearer of ill news.

MESSENGER.

O guilty of a crime beyond all crimes,
Medea, fly, fly over land or sea,
And never leave thy chariot or thy barque.

MEDEA.

What is it that prescribes such headlong flight?

MESSENGER.

The Princess and King Creon, both are dead,
And both to thy fell poisons owe their death.

MEDEA.

Good news thou bring'st, and thou shalt numbered be
Among my benefactors and my friends.

MESSENGER.

How, lady? art thou sane or dost thou rave,
Who, hearing of the ruin that has fall'n
Upon the royal hearth, dost joy therein?

MEDEA.

Somewhat in answer I might have to say,
Did the time serve. But be not hasty, friend,
Tell me the manner of their death. My joy
Is doubled if their agony was great.

MESSENGER.

When to the palace came thy children twain,
Led by their sire, and reached the bridal bower,
We of the household that deplored thy wrongs
Did mark it, and the whisper passed around
That between thee and Jason there was peace.
One kissed the children's hands, their golden hair
Another; I too, glad to see them there,
Went to the woman's chamber after them.
She that is now our mistress in thy place,
Before the pair of children caught her eye,
On Jason fondly turned a look of love;
But soon she put her hand before her eyes
And turned her beauteous face another way,
Hating to see the children. Jason then
Strove to allay his consort's rising wrath,
Saying, "No more hate those that hate not thee,
Dismiss thy anger, turn thy head again,

And learn to count thy husband's friends as thine.
Receive the presents, and entreat thy sire
'These to release from exile for my sake.'

She, when she saw the bravery, gave way,
And promised all her husband asked ; nor long
Had Jason and the children left the house
When she put on the richly brodered robe,
And, twining in her hair the golden wreath,
Before the glittering mirror dressed her locks,
Smiling at what she saw reflected there.

Then from her seat she rose, and through the hall
Paced gaily to and fro with dainty steps,
Exulting in the rich attire, and oft
Casting a glance down at her shapely foot.

What follows was appalling to behold :

Sudden her colour changed, her limbs gave way,
Reeling, she staggered back, and scarce her seat
Received her fainting form ; she well-nigh fell.

An old attendant, deeming that the wrath
Of Pan or of some god had come on her,
Shrilled forth a prayer, until she marked the foam

That issued from her lady's lips, her eyes
Upturned in agony, her bloodless hue ;

Then was the prayer changed to a dismal shriek.

Forthwith one maiden to the King's abode,
And one to him that was your husband, ran,
To tell the bride's disaster, while the house
Resounded with the noise of hurrying feet.

The time had passed which a swift runner takes
To reach the goal of the foot-racer's course,

When she who had lain speechless, with closed eyes,
Awakened with a groan of agony,
For death assailed her in a double form ;
The wreath of gold with which her hair was twined
Poured forth a wondrous stream of ravening fire,
While the fine tissue which thy children gave,
Ate into the unhappy damsel's flesh.
Up from her seat she sprang, and wrapped in fire,
She flew, tossing her head from side to side
To throw the circlet from her, but the clasp
Tightened its fatal pressure ; while the fire,
The more she shook her ringlets, blazed the more.
Then down she sank, o'erwhelmed with agony,
And no one would have known her save her sire.
Her gentle eyes were seen no more, no more
Was seen her beauteous face, while from her head
Ran down a mingled stream of blood and fire,
And from her bones, gnawed by the drug, the flesh
Fell off, as from the pine tree drops the gum,
A hideous sight. We all there present feared
To touch the dead, taught by what we had seen.
But her unhappy father, bursting in,
Unwitting flung himself upon the corpse,
And loudly shrieking, in a close embrace
Folded and kissed it. "O my child," he cried,
"What cruel power has brought thee to this end?
Who robs this worn-out carcass of thy love?
Would, O my daughter, I had died with thee."
Sated at last with moans, his wailings spent,
The aged King essayed to rise again,

But to the corpse he clave as ivy cleaves
To bay. A fearful struggle then ensued.
The old man sought to raise him from his knees,
But the dead held him down ; and if by force
He thrust her off, she tore his flesh away.
At last, o'ermastered by his agony,
The poor old King gave way, and breathed his last.
There lie the pair, the daughter and the sire,
A sight that none can look on without tears.
Of thee I say no word. Thyself will find
Means of escaping from thy punishment.
But this our mortal state, once more I see,
Is but a fleeting shadow, while the wise
And deeply-learned, I boldly will affirm,
Are found to be the most befooled of all ;
To none on earth does happiness belong.
Good luck, a man, when streams of wealth flow in,
May have, but good luck is not happiness.

HIPPOLYTUS.

THE story of Hippolytus bears some resemblance to that of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Hippolytus is the son of Theseus, King of Athens, by an Amazon. He lives an ascetic life, renouncing love and communing with the chaste Goddess Artemis. His step-mother Phædra falls in love with him. He repels her love. She hangs herself, with a letter in her hand accusing Hippolytus of an attempt upon her virtue. Theseus, who has been absent from home, on his return finds his queen a corpse, reads the letter, and convinced by it of the guilt of Hippolytus, banishes him, and invokes upon him the curse of Neptune, who sends a monster to destroy him. Before he expires, Artemis appears and reveals the truth.

THE LIFE OF CHASTITY.

Hippolytus describes his life of unwedded purity as a votary of Artemis.

LINES 58-120.

HIPPOLYTUS.

(To the ATTENDANTS.)

Come on, and as ye foot it raise
To Artemis the song of praise,
The heavenly mistress of our lays.

ATTENDANTS.

Sing Artemis, sing Artemis,
That our thrice-honoured sov'reign is ;
Sing her, of mighty Zeus the child,
And of Latona undefiled,
That dwelleth with her sire on high,
In the bright mansions of the sky,
Sweet flower of all virginity.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Lady, this garland have I twined for thee
Of flowers fresh gathered from the virgin mead,
Where never shepherd dares to feed his sheep
Nor mower's scythe is seen ; only the bee
In springtide through that holy meadow flits,
And chastity, with clear streams, waters it.
They in whose hearts dwells native purity

Unharm'd may cull the blossoms from that mead,
But none with hand profane may gather there.
Take thou this wreath to deck thy golden locks,
For holy is the hand that offers it.
To me alone belongs this privilege :
I in thy presence live, converse with thee,
I hear thy voice, although I see thee not.
And as my life began, so may it end.

ATTENDANTS.

Prince, — masters, we should call the gods alone, —
Wilt thou to wholesome counsels lend thine ear?

HIPPOLYTUS.

That will I, else my wisdom were but scant.

ATTENDANTS.

Dost know what is the manner of mankind?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Thy words are dark, what does thy question bode?

ATTENDANTS.

It is to hate proud airs and haughtiness.

HIPPOLYTUS.

And men are right. Whom does not pride offend?

ATTENDANTS.

Is there a charm in affability?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Certes there is, and profit cheaply won.

ATTENDANTS.

What think'st thou of the gods? Feel they as men?

HIPPOLYTUS.

They must, if men are fashioned as the gods.

ATTENDANTS.

Why then dost flout a puissant deity?

HIPPOLYTUS.

What deity? Be guarded in thy speech.

ATTENDANTS.

The Queen of Love, that stands above thy gate.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Chastity pays her distant reverence.

ATTENDANTS.

Yet is she great and honoured of mankind.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Each has his favourite man, his patron god.

ATTENDANTS.

May'st thou be blest, and wisdom have enow.

HIPPOLYTUS.

I love not gods that are adored by night.

ATTENDANTS.

Each god, dear youth, must have his own domain.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Forward, attendants, to the palace there,
Make ready our repast. After the hunt
Good fare is welcome. Groom my horses too,
That, my meal ended, I may harness them
And drive them forth for needful exercise.
Of thy great Queen of Love nothing reck I.
(*Exit* HIPPOLYTUS.)

ATTENDANTS.

We, following not the lead of heady youth,
Nor having higher thoughts than fit the slave,
Will to thy statue render reverence due,
O Queen of Love. Great goddess, pardon him
Who in his boyish heat of frowardness
Does thee despise ; be deaf to his rash words ;
The gods are wiser than we mortals are.

PHÆDRA'S CONFESSION.

Phædra betrays her love of Hippolytus to her Nurse and the Chorus.

LINES 267-361.

CHORUS.

O grey-haired lady, Phædra's faithful nurse,
That our good Queen is sick we see too well,
But what her sickness is we cannot see ;
This is it that of thee we fain would learn.

NURSE.

I question her in vain ; she will not tell.

CHORUS.

Will she not tell the source of her disease ?

NURSE.

'Tis all the same, she nothing will reveal.

CHORUS.

And so she mutely pines and wastes away.

NURSE.

Why, for three days no food has passed her lips.

CHORUS.

Is this distraction or desire of death ?

NURSE.

'Tis death she seeks ; she starves that she may die.

CHORUS.

'Tis strange the King should suffer this to be.

NURSE.

She hides her smart and vows she is not sick.

CHORUS.

Does not her face bewray the truth to him ?

NURSE.

He sees it not. The King is now from home.

CHORUS.

Canst thou not, by close questioning, the cause
Of sickness or of madness wring from her ?

NURSE.

I have tried all, and nothing will avail.
And yet once more mine utmost skill I'll prove.
That thy own senses may the witness be
To my true service and my loyalty.

(To PHÆDRA, who is brought in on a couch.)

Come, come, dear child ; let all that has been said
Be banished from our minds ; be thou more sweet,
Unbend thy frowning brow, open thy heart,
And I, if aught I said hit not thy wish,
Will let it go, and find some better way.

If thy disease be such as women hide,
See women here to give thee kindly help.
If it is such as may be told to men,
Speak, that we may on sage physicians call.
What ! Silence still ? Silence beseems thee not.
If I say ill, show me wherein I err ;
If I say well, assent to what I say,
Speak but one word, look on me.

(*To the CHORUS.*)

Well-a-day,

Ladies, ye see our pains are spent in vain,
And we as far as ever from our mark ;
Unmoved she was, unmoved she still remains.

(*To PHÆDRA.*)

But thou, thou'rt deafer than the sea ; hear this :
By dying thou thy children wilt betray,
And oust them from their father's heritage,
So surely as the martial Amazon
To mate thy progeny a bastard bore,
In soul no bastard ; well thou know'st his name, —
Hippolytus.

PHÆDRA.

Ah me !

NURSE.

Ha ! Does that touch ?

PHÆDRA.

O nurse, thou dost undo me ; by the gods
I pray thee never name that name again.

NURSE.

So thou dost see aright, and yet refuse
To save thy children's hopes and thy own life !

PHÆDRA.

Not for my children am I troubled now.

NURSE.

Surely thou hast no blood upon thy hands ?

PHÆDRA.

My hands are clean, but there's a stain within.

NURSE.

Is it the work of strangers and unfriends ?

PHÆDRA.

They that unwitting slay me, love me well.

NURSE.

Has Theseus then in aught offended thee ?

PHÆDRA.

May I no more wrong him than he wrongs me.

NURSE.

Whence, then, this desperate resolve to die ?

PHÆDRA.

Give thou my madness course ; it hurts not thee.

NURSE.

Not with intent, yet is thy ruin mine.

PHÆDRA.

What art thou doing? Clasp not thus my hand.

NURSE.

Still to thy hand and to thy knees I'll cling.

PHÆDRA.

'Thou seek'st to know what known will be thy bane.

NURSE.

Bane greater can be none than losing thee.

PHÆDRA.

'Twere death to tell, yet honour 'twere, if told.

NURSE.

And yet thou hid'st it, deaf to all my prayers.

PHÆDRA.

The cause is base, although the deed is brave.

NURSE.

Speak, then ; the greater honour will be thine.

PHÆDRA.

Let go my hand, I pray, and get thee hence.

NURSE.

Not until thou dost grant my righteous prayer.

PHÆDRA.

Grant it I will ; I reverence thy right hand.

NURSE.

I say no more ; 'tis thine henceforth to speak.

PHÆDRA.

O hapless mother, what a love was thine !

NURSE.

Speakest thou of Pasiphaë's wayward lust ?

PHÆDRA.

And thine, my sister, Dionysus' bride !¹

NURSE.

Hush, child, thou dost disparage thine own kin.

PHÆDRA.

And now, to make a third, I too have fallen.

NURSE.

Amazement fills me ; what is coming now ?

¹ Ariadne, deserted by Theseus in the island of Naxos and afterwards wedded to Bacchus. Phædra intimates that the propensity to unnatural or irregular love ran in her family.

PHÆDRA.

'Tis in the blood ; 'tis no new malady.

NURSE.

Yet I know not that which I crave to know

PHÆDRA.

I would thy lips, not mine, could utter it.

NURSE.

No magic power have I to read thy thought.

PHÆDRA.

What is the thing, good nurse, that men call "love"?

NURSE.

It is the sweetest, saddest thing in life.

PHÆDRA.

Its sadness, not its sweetness, then, is mine.

NURSE.

What, child, art thou in love with any one?

PHÆDRA.

What call ye him, son of the Amazon?

NURSE.

Hippolytus.

PHÆDRA.

'Tis thou that namest him.

NURSE.

Alas, my child, what say'st thou? all is lost ;
 Ladies, the thought is unendurable.
 I cannot live ; I do abhor the light ;
 I'll hurl myself down from some precipice
 To quit me of my life ; farewell for aye.
 The virtuous soul is, in its own despite,
 Dragged down to lust. Cypris no goddess is ;
 Hers is a power above the power of gods,
 Which has undone my Queen, my house, and me.

THE TEMPTRESS.

The Nurse counsels Phædra to yield to love and suggests a love-philtre, meaning, however, to approach Hippolytus, as Phædra suspects, pretending, at the same time, to abhor the thought.

LINES 373-524.

PHÆDRA.

Træzenian ladies, whose illustrious home
 Is in this vestibule of Pelops' realm,¹
 Oft have I lain awake by night and thought
 Whence came the evils of this mortal life ;
 And my creed is that not through lack of wit
 Men go astray, for most of them have sense
 Sufficient, but that we must look elsewhere.

¹ The easternmost point or front of the Peloponnesus.

Discourse of reason tells us what is right,
But we fall short in action ; some from sloth,
Some because love of pleasure overcomes
The nobler impulses ; temptations swarm,
As gossipry and idless, deadly sweet,
And shame, whereof there are two kinds ; one true,
One false and baneful ; were the occasions clear
For each, their names would not be spelt alike.
This being fixed beforehand in my thought,
No drug would have disturbed my sense thereof,
Nor wrought me from the bias of my thought,
The history of my heart I will recount.
When first I felt love's wound, I cast about
How I might best endure it. I began
With silence, and concealment of my smart ;
For an untrusty member is the tongue :
Well can it preach to others out of doors,
But breeds itself mischief untold at home.
Then I essayed, by virtuous self-control
To quell rebellious passion, and at last,
Finding that by no means or artifice
Could love be vanquished, I resolved to die.
To die is best ; I will not be gainsaid ;
My honour I would have the world to know,
And my dishonour hide from every eye.
I knew the lust and deed were infamous ;
I knew I was a woman, by that name
Hateful to all. Cursed may her mem'ry be
Who first brought shame upon the marriage bed
By wandering loves. From noble families

This pest came forth to spread through womankind.
For when the highborn stoop to infamy,
Foulness may to the lowly well seem fair.
Most hateful who, with virtue on their lips,
In darkness scruple not the deed of shame.
How can they dare, O sea-born Queen of Love,
'To look their injured consorts in the face?
Do they not quake at their accomplice night,
And tremble, lest the conscious walls should speak?
This fear, my friends, fills me with agony,
That I may bring dishonour on my lord
And on my children, whom I fain would have
Freemen of glorious Athens, flourishing
Among their peers, unstained by act of mine.
A man, howe'er highsouled, is half a slave
When in his breast he bears a parent's shame.
Nothing, say all, will bide the tug of life
But genuine virtue seated in the soul.
Time, like a mirror to a maiden's face
Held up, exposes, when the hour has come,
The counterfeit. Ne'er may that fate be mine.

CHORUS.

Ah me ! how fair is virtue everywhere ;
How fruitful everywhere of good report.

NURSE.

My Queen, when first I heard thy tale of woe,
A sudden horror overwhelmed my soul ;
But now I see my judgment was but slight,

And that our second thought is always best.
What has befallen my Queen is nothing strange ;
'Tis but the angry goddess' common stroke.
Thou art in love ; well, so is half mankind.
And wilt thou throw away thy life for love ?
Love were dear bought by all who lovers are
Or ever shall be, if the price were life.
Cypris' full force no mortal can withstand.
Those who submit she treats with gentleness,
But on the arrogant and proud of heart
Tramples with unimagined tyranny.
She walks the firmament, the ocean wave,
Pervading all things, and gives birth to all.
To her we owe the fruitful seed of life
From which all dwellers here on earth do spring.
They who can read what men of old have writ,
Or are themselves the votaries of the Muse,
Can tell how Zeus was smitten with the love
Of Semele, and how the radiant Queen
Of morning bore her Cephalus to heaven.
Yet both have kept their dwellings in the skies,
And shun not the society of gods.
They make the best, it seems, of their mischance.
And why not thou ? Behoved thee to be born
On thine own terms or under other gods,
If thou art not content with the world's way ?
How oft, think you, do men of soundest sense
Wink hard at the invasion of their beds ?
How oft do fathers, when their sons go wrong,
Help them to gratify their wandering loves ?

Keep close and all is fair, so hold the wise.
Strive not life's roughness to refine too much.
The builder does not on all stones alike
Bestow his polish. Fall'n in fortune's pit,
Thou must escape from it as best thou may'st.
If thou hast in thee more of good than ill,
Be sure that for a mortal thou dost well.
Put by, dear daughter, thy perverse resolve ;
Be not so froward, for 'tis frowardness
To think to get the better of the gods ;
Give love its way : such is the will of heaven.
If thou canst not avoid, assuage the smart ;
Witchcraft yet hath its charms and spells good store,
And medicine for thy sickness will be found.
Long might dull man rack his poor brains in vain
Where woman's wit could not find out the way.

CHORUS.

Phædra, what now she counsels thee is best
In face of present ills. Praise is thy due
For high resolve to die ; but praise so earned
Would cost thee more than what she now propounds.

PHÆDRA.

This, this it is that ruins prosperous states
And happy homes, — the power of cunning words.
Let us not list to that which charms the ear,
But to that only which points honour's way.

NURSE.

Leave this high talk ; fine words are not the cure.

The cure's the man. Him must thou now essay
By telling him thy case, and plainly, too.
Hadst thou not fall'n into temptation's trap,
But lived a virtuous lady all thy days,
I had not ministered to thy desires
So far as this ; but now 'tis life or death,
And virtue well may be a little blind.

PHÆDRA.

Avaunt, avaunt ! close thy unhallowed lips.
Let them not breathe dishonour to me more.

NURSE.

Dishonour, true ; yet honour's better part.
Better the deed, if it will save thy life,
Than the fine name, which boasting, thou must die.

PHÆDRA.

Hold there, I pray thee. Wicked are thy words,
Yet too prevailing. I have schooled my heart
To bear. But if for ill thou plead'st so well,
I shall be wrecked on that which now I shun.

NURSE.

If such thy mind, thou shouldst have never sinned.
Since thou hast sinned, 'tis best to follow me.
I do bethink me that I have within
Some philtres that assuage the pangs of love.
These without shame or damage of your mind,
Only be brave, will ease thee of thy smart.

But something we must have from thy beloved,
Some sign or token, something he has worn,
To blend your hearts and to complete the charm.

PHÆDRA.

An ointment or a potion, which is it?

NURSE.

I may not tell. Enough, 'twill work thy cure.

PHÆDRA.

I fear thy shrewdness may prove over shrewd.

NURSE.

Thou'rt full of vain alarms ; what fear'st thou now?

PHÆDRA.

That thou mayest something say to 'Theseus' son.

NURSE.

Let be, my child. All shall be ordered right.
Only do thou, O puissant Queen of Love,
Lend me thine aid. What else I have in view
Would best be told to friendly ears within.

CHASTITY UNASSAILABLE.

The Nurse having approached Hippolytus on behalf of Phædra with overtures of love, a burst of indignation on his part follows.

LINES 601-668.

HIPPOLYTUS.

O mother Earth ! O glory of the Sun,
What shame unutterable have I heard !

NURSE.

Hush, hush, my son ; thou wilt be overheard.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Think not that I will hide such infamy.

NURSE.

I do entreat thee by thy fair right hand.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Lay not thy hand on me ; let go my robe.

NURSE.

O, I conjure thee, do not ruin me.

HIPPOLYTUS.

How ruin, if thou hast said nothing wrong ?

NURSE.

My son, this is not for the common ear.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Most honest craves the largest audience.

NURSE.

Dear youth, thou wilt not break thy plighted oath?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Only my lips have sworn, my mind is free.

NURSE.

Thou wilt not pluck destruction on thy friends?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Avaunt ! the wicked are no friends of mine.

NURSE.

Have mercy, child ; mankind will sometimes err.

HIPPOLYTUS.

O Zeus, why hast thou brought into the world
To plague us such a tricky thing as woman?
If thou didst wish to propagate mankind,
Couldst thou not find some better way than this?
We to the temples might have brought our price
In gold or weight of iron or of brass,
And purchased offspring, each to the amount

Of that which he had paid ; and so have dwelt
In quiet homes unvexed of womankind.
Now, to import a plague into our homes,
First of our substance we make sacrifice ;
And here at once we see what woman is ;
The father that begot her gladly pays
A dow'ry that he may be rid of her,
While he that brings this slip of evil home,
Fond man, adorns with costly ornament
A worthless idol, and his living wastes
To trick her out in costly finery.
He has no choice. Are his connections good,
To keep them he must keep a hated wife ;
Are his connections bad, he can but weigh
Against that evil a good bedfellow.
His is the easiest lot who has to wife
A cipher, a good-natured simpleton ;
Quick wits are hateful. Ne'er may wife of mine
Be wiser than consorts with womanhood.
In your quick-witted dames the power of love
More wickedness engenders ; while the dull
Are by their dullness saved from going wrong.
'Twere well if wives and servants ne'er could meet,
But wives be served by some mute animals,
So might our dames have none to prattle to,
Or none to prattle to them in return.
Your naughty woman plots within the house
The evils which her handmaid works abroad,
As thou, accursed hag, hast tempted me
To violate my father's sacred bed.

I'll seek some stream, and thy polluting words
Wash from my ears. How should I do that thing
Which having heard, I deem myself unclean?
Thou ow'st thy safety to my piety.
Had I not taken an unguarded oath,
My father would have heard thy infamy.
Now will I hold my peace and get me hence,
Till Theseus, who is now abroad, comes home.
With him returning, I shall mark thy face
And that of yonder lady, meeting him,
And take the measure of your shamelessness.
Perish ! How deep my hate of woman is
Not though I spoke forever could I tell,
For there is no end of their wickedness.
Either let womankind learn modesty,
Or let me rail for aye at womankind.

THE FALSE CHARGE.

Theseus, on the strength of the letter found in the hand of the dead Phædra, brings a charge of adultery against Hippolytus, who defends himself, but is banished by his father.

LINES 902-1101.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Father, thy cries have brought me here in haste,
But what it is that hath called forth thy wails
I know not ; from thy lips I fain would hear.

What's this I see? can I believe mine eyes?
Is it thy Queen, father, that there lies dead?
Can it be she I left an hour ago,
That but an hour ago looked on the sun?
What has befallen? what brought her to her end?
Speak, father, speak! What! art thou silent still?
Silence avails not in calamity;
For still the curious and impatient heart,
In the dark hour will crave to know the worst.
Whatever thy affliction, it were wrong
To hide it from thy friends, thy more than friends.

THESEUS.

O erring and deluded race of men,
How does it come to pass, with all your arts,
Discoveries, and inventions numberless,
That one thing you have never tried to find,
A way of teaching wisdom to the fool?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Surpassing that inventor's skill must be,
Who finds a way of making folly wise.
But ill-timed, father, are these subtleties.
I fear affliction makes thy tongue run wild.

THESEUS.

O would there were some touchstone of the heart
To know affection from its counterfeit,
Some mark to tell real from professing friends;
Or that two voices to each man were given,

One truthful, and the other as might hap,
That thus the insincere by the sincere
Might be gainsaid, and we not be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Has some one breathed false charges in thine ear?
And do I suffer, having done no wrong?
I am astounded at these words of thine,
Which go so far astray from reason's course.

THESEUS.

Ah ! To what pitch will human daring mount?
What measure is there of audacity?
If it still waxes with the length of life,
And each man outstrips him that went before
In wickedness, the gods will have to add
Another world to this, to make a place
Wherein the true and pure of heart may dwell.
Look on this man who, owing life to me,
Dares to defile my marriage bed, and stands
Branded with infamy by her who's gone.
Steeped in pollution as thou art, now look,
Look, if thou canst, thy father in the face.
Thou art the man, superior to his kind,
Mate of the gods, and prince of chastity.
Small faith in thy divine converse have I ;
To deem the gods so blind were blasphemy.
Go, now, thou boaster, with thy peddling rules
Of lifeless food ; with Orpheus for thy chief.
Act thy mysterious rites, all sound and smoke.

For thou dost stand detected, and I warn
All men to shun the likes of thee, that lure
With fair discourses, and are knaves at heart.
My Queen is dead. And dost thou think her death
Will save thee? Villain, it will be thy doom.
What oaths of thine, what pleadings can avail
Against her word, to prove thy innocence?
Thou'd say she hated thee; that bastardy
Is still detested of the lawful wife.
But ill she must have understood life's worth,
If she could truck it for revenge on thee.
Woman, thou wilt allege, to folly stoops,
While man stoops not; but young men, well I know,
Are every whit as frail as womankind.
In passion's hour, when love distracts the soul,
Their manhood does but lend their passion force.
Why should I wage with thee this war of words,
When yonder lies the damning evidence?
Go, get thee hence at once, a banished man,
Nor in renownéd Athens set thy foot,
Or upon any land that owns my sway.
If for such wrong, vengeance I fail to take,
The Isthmian Sinis¹ will deny the hand
That conquered him, and swear 'twas idle boast;
Nor will the sea-girt rocks of Sciron² own
That robbers have good cause to dread my name.

¹ The robber who infested the Isthmus of Corinth. He was slain by Theseus.

² Rocks near Megara, the haunt of Sciron, who hurled strangers into the sea. He also was slain by Theseus.

CHORUS.

I know not whom of mortals to call blest,
Since what was highest once is now brought low.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Father, the rage and tempest of thy soul
Awe me ; but thy arraignment, seeming strong,
Look but beneath its outward face, is weak ;
I am not trained to speak to multitudes ;
My fittest audience are my youthful peers ;
Wherein is compensation, for good sense,
That sways the few, is nowise popular.
Howe'er, in this distress I must essay
To speak. And first, I will confront the charge
Which thou deem'st damning to my innocence
And without answer. Dost thou see yon sun?
This earth? They look not on a heart more free
From lust than mine, deny it as thou mayst.
First, I have learned to reverence the gods,
And choose for friends such as attempt no wrong,
From whom proceed no guilty overtures,
Who never lend their aid to infamy ;
Nor am I a false-hearted backbiter,
But to the present and the absent true.
Of one thing am I clear, say what thou wilt,
No woman to this day has shared my bed,
Nor know I of such things more than I hear,
Or see in pictures, and to look on these
Is little pleasure to a virgin soul.

Perchance thou dost not trust my chastity ;
Then must thou show whence its corruption came.
What ! was this dame of all her sex so far
The fairest ? Did I think to win in her
The mistress of thy wealth and be thy heir ?
What folly or what madness must be mine.
But sov'reignty, thou'lt tell me, may have charms
To tempt the chaste. Not unless royalty
Does utterly pervert the aspiring mind.
In the Hellenic games to be the first
Was my ambition ; second in the State,
To thee, with all the noblest for my friends.
This were a happy life, from danger free,
And rather to be prized than sov'reignty.
One plea remains, which pleaded, all is said :
Could I produce a witness like myself,
And lived yon lady to confront me here,
Facts would make known to thee the guilty one.
But now by Zeus, and by the sacred Earth,
I swear that ne'er did I approach thy wife,
Nor ever cast on her the eye of lust.
O may I perish without name or fame,
An outlawed, homeless, friendless, banished man,
And when I die may neither land or sea
Receive my corpse, if I have sinned herein.
Whether yon lady threw away her life
In fear, I know not, and no more must say.
She showed her wisdom while she wisdom lacked ;
I had it, but I failed to use it well.

CHORUS.

The oath that thou didst tender by the gods
Is good defence and strong security.

THESEUS.

Is not this youth some juggling sorcerer
Who thinks that he can by his cool address
Cozen the soul of his dishonoured sire?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Father, thy course to me seems wonderful,
For had I been thy father, thou my son,
And hadst thou laid thy hand upon my wife.
Certes I would have slain, not banished, thee.

THESEUS.

How just that word ! and yet thou shalt not die,
Though thine own lips have laid it down for law,
For speediest death is sorrow's quickest cure ;
But thou shalt be sent forth to banishment,
And amongst strangers drain the dregs of life.
Such is the meed of thy impiety.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ah me ! and wilt thou not give space for time
To try my cause, but thrust me forth at once?

THESEUS.

Ay ; and beyond the far Atlantic wave,
Had I the power, so deep my hate of thee.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Wilt thou no trial make of ordeal, oaths,
Or divinations, ere thou banish me?

THESEUS.

Yon letter, albeit by no augur writ,
Is damning proof against thee. For the birds
That hover o'er our heads I heed them not.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ye gods ! why do not I my secret tell?
My reverence for you is slaying me.
But no, my word will with no credence meet,
And I should but forswear myself in vain.

THESEUS.

O how my soul abhors thy solemn cant !
Hence on the instant ! quit thy fatherland.

HIPPOLYTUS.

O whither shall I turn? beneath whose roof
Shall I, thus branded, entertainment find?

THESEUS.

Beneath his roof who loves to have as guests
Adulterers and privy paramours.

HIPPOLYTUS.

This stabs my heart, draws tears, to think that I
Am shamed, and thou dost ratify my shame.

THESEUS.

That was the time for forecast and remorse,
When thou didst tempt thy father's wife to sin.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Would, O ye walls, ye could your witness bear,
And voice aloud my guilt or innocence.

THESEUS.

How ! Dost thou to dumb witnesses resort ?
Yonder lies one that damns thee without speech.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Could I but see myself as I am seen,
I should my own sad plight compassionate.

THESEUS.

Self-worship, and not filial piety,
Is thy strong point, all righteous as thou art.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Alas ! poor mother mine and ill-starred son,
How piteous is the lot of bastardy.

THESEUS.

Drag him away, slaves. Heard ye not long since
Sentence of banishment pronounced on him ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

They at their peril will lay hands on me ;
Thyself fulfil thy sentence if thou wilt.

THESEUS.

Why, so I will, if thou obey'st me not ;
No pity moves me at thy banishment.

HIPPOLYTUS.

The die, it seems, is cast. Alas for me !
I know, yet what I know I may not tell.
O my dear patroness, Latona's child,
Partner in grove and chase, we are thrust forth
From glorious Athens. Then a long farewell,
Erechtheus, to thy town, farewell to you
Troezenian plains, ye happy haunts of youth,
For I shall never look upon ye more.
Come on, my youthful comrades of this land,
Speed and escort me to my banishment ;
A man more virtuous ye shall ne'er behold
Than me, albeit my father does me wrong.

THE CATASTROPHE.

Hippolytus is attacked by a monster sent by Neptune at the prayer of Theseus. His chariot is overturned and he receives his death stroke. A messenger who had been an eye-witness tells the story.

LINES 1153-1254.

(MESSENGER *enters*.)

MESSENGER.

Whither, O ladies, whither must I turn
To find King Theseus, monarch of this land ?
Tell, if ye can. Is he within the house ?

CHORUS.

Lo, from the house the King himself comes forth.

(*Enter THESEUS.*)

MESSENGER.

Theseus, I tidings bring of grave import
To thee, to all Athenian citizens,
And all who in Trœzenian confines dwell.

THESEUS.

What is thy news? has some calamity
Upon the two confederate cities fall'n? ¹

MESSENGER.

Hippolytus is slain, slain one may say ;
His life just trembles in the wavering scale.

THESEUS.

Slain by whose hand? That of some enemy
Whose wife he had been ravishing like mine?

MESSENGER.

The authors of his death were his own steeds ;
These, and thy curses which thou hadst invoked
Thy sire, the god of ocean, to fulfil.

THESEUS.

Thank Heaven ! Poseidon, thou'rt my sire indeed,
Since thou hast heard and ratified my prayer.

¹ That is, Athens and Trœzen, which are taken to be under one king.

How did he meet his death? How did the trap
Of justice catch him that dishonoured me?

MESSENGER.

Upon the course beside the wave-washed beach,
We were engaged in dressing down the steeds,
Weeping the while ; for one had come to say
That in this land Hippolytus would dwell
No more, condemned by thee to banishment.
Himself the tearful tidings to confirm,
Came to us on the beach, and with him trooped
A long procession of attendant youths.
At last his moanings ended, and he cried,
“What boots this anguish? To my sire’s decree
I needs must bow. Harness my horses there,
Servants ; this city is no longer mine.”
Then each man bent him to the work in haste,
And quick as thought, we in their harness dight
The steeds, and led them where their master stood.
He from the car-front gathered up the reins
And mounted, all unbooted as he was.
Then lifted up his hands to heaven and cried,
“O Zeus, if I am guilty, may I die ;
Grant that my father, if not while I live,
When I am dead, may see that I am wronged.”
Meantime the goad he took and pricked the steeds
Together pacing, while we servitors
Walked by our master at his horses’ heads,
Toward Argos and the Epidaurean coast.
Now to a solitary shore we came.

There is a headland on the further side,
Where the Saronic Gulf comes first in view ;
From this, a subterranean rumbling rose,
With sound like thunder, terrible to hear.
The horses raised their heads and pricked their ears ;
We, overwhelmed with fright, stood wondering
What the dread sound could be ; when, as we looked
Towards the beach, behold a mighty wave
That rose heaven-high, and from my sight shut out
Tall Scyrus' cliffs, while Isthmus, and the rock
That bears Asclepias' name, were lost to view.
Then, swelling to portentous size, and capped
With angry foam belched by the roaring sea ;
Onward it rolled, to where the chariot stood,
And as it broke, a torrent flood of brine,
It cast forth on the beach a monstrous bull,
Whose bellowing filled the shores around and woke
Appalling echoes, to all present there
A spectacle on which they feared to look.
The steeds at once were seized with wild affright.
Their master, whom long practice with the ways
Of horses made familiar, grasped the reins,
And pulled them, as a rower pulls his oar,
'Throwing his body back upon their thongs.
But his scared steeds, the bits between their teeth,
Ran headlong, heedless of the guiding hand,
Ungovernable by the bit or rein,
And reckless of the car. Oft as he tried
To steer them towards the soft and sandy beach,
The bull would cross their front and from their course

With maddening apparition drive the team.
But when towards the rocks they wildly rushed,
The bull would close upon them silently,
Until at last upon a point of rock,
Dashing its wheel, the car was overturned.
Then all was wreck and ruin, from the wheels,
The naves, the linchpins from the axles flew,
While, hopelessly entangled in the reins,
Was dragged along the luckless charioteer,
Dashing his head against the cruel rocks,
Tearing his flesh, and uttering piteous cries :
“ Stop ! stop ! ye steeds, that in my stalls have fed ;
Destroy me not. Alas, my father’s curse !
Shall such a one as I find none to save ? ”
To save him many of us ran full fast,
Yet were outstripped. At length, I know not how,
He slipped from out the coil of tangling reins
And fell, but scarce a breath of life was left.
The horses and the monster disappeared
Mysteriously, beneath the rocky shore.
O King, I am a servant of thy house,
Yet never shall I bring me to believe
The hideous crime thy son was charged withal,
Not though all womankind should hang themselves,
Not though all Ida’s pine wood should be filled
With writing, for too well his worth I know.

ALCESTIS.

ADMETUS, King of Pheræ, is warned of an oracle that he must die unless he can find some one who will die in his place. His old father and mother, and all his relatives and friends, refuse. But his wife Alcestis consents, and dies. She is rescued from Death and restored to her husband by Hercules, who, in the course of his adventurous wanderings, comes as guest to the house of Admetus. The play is rather a melodrama than a tragedy, and there is a dash of comedy in the character of Hercules.

ALCESTIS PREPARING TO MEET DEATH FOR HER HUSBAND.

LINES 137-198.

CHORUS.

Yonder a maiden from the palace comes,
All bathed in tears ; what tidings will she bring?
(*To the HANDMAIDEN.*)
To weep for the misfortune of thy lord
Becomes thee well. Yet stay these tears, and tell
Whether thy lady lives or lives no more.

HANDMAIDEN.

Dead, living, thou may'st say ; and living, dead.

CHORUS.

How can two opposites thus meet in one ?

HANDMAIDEN.

Prostrate she lies, and breathing forth her soul.

CHORUS.

O, hapless husband, what a wife you lose.

HANDMAIDEN.

This will be fully felt when she is gone.

CHORUS.

Is there no hope that yet she may be saved ?

HANDMAIDEN.

There is no hope ; the iron hour has come.

CHORUS.

Are then the funeral rites being prepared ?

HANDMAIDEN.

The jewels are set out to deck the corpse.

CHORUS.

In thee will die the pride of womanhood,
The noblest lady that the sun beholds.

HANDMAIDEN.

Noblest, indeed. Who can dispute her claim.
What must the woman be that could surpass
Such excellence? Could wedded love receive
More honour than from her who dies for it?
This the whole city knows; what passed within,
Rehearsed, will fill thy soul with wonderment.
When came the appointed day, her spotless skin
She washed with water from the flowing stream,
Then from the cedarn coffers robes and gems
Taking, arrayed herself in fair attire;
Next at the hearth she stood, and thus she prayed:
“Goddess, I go to the dark underworld;
Do thou to this my dying prayer give ear:
Befriend my orphan children twain, grant her
A noble husband, him a loving wife;
And let them not like me, their mother, die,
Before their hour, but let them happier
Live their full measure in their fatherland.”
Then round the altars of Adrastus’ house
She went; on each, culling the myrtle’s leaves,
She laid a votive wreath; at each she prayed,
Tearless, without a moan, nor did the sense
Of coming death make her fair cheek grow pale;
So to her nuptial chamber passed she on.
There tears burst forth. “O marriage bed,” she cried.
“Where first my virgin girdle I untied
For this my husband for whom now I die,
Farewell; I blame thee not; loyal to thee,

And to my lord, alone to death I go.
Another wife shall now inherit thee,
Happier, perchance ; more true she cannot be.”
Then, falling on the bed, she covered it
With kisses, drenched it with her streaming tears,
And having wept till she could weep no more,
With downcast face she tore herself away ;
Yet often to the chamber she returned,
And threw herself again upon the bed.
Meanwhile her children to her garments clung
Sobbing ; and she unto her arms would take
By turns, and fold them in a last embrace.
Throughout the mansion every servant wept,
Mourning their mistress ; she gave each her hand,
And there was none so mean among them all,
With whom she did not kindly words exchange.
Such anguish has Admetus in his home.
His death had ended all ; escaping death,
He lives to sorrow with his latest breath.

THE LAST WORDS AND DEATH OF ALCESTIS.

LINES 280-392.

ALCESTIS.

Thou seest, Admetus, how it fares with me.
Before I go, hear my last testament :
Holding thy life more precious than my own,

And that thou rather than myself might see
The sun's light, of my own free will I die.
To wed of all Thessalians whom I would,
To dwell a queen in happiness was mine,
If so I chose ; but I chose not to live
Thy widow, with thy children fatherless ;
Nor cleave I to the pleasant things of youth.
Thy father and thy mother both proved false
To nature's call, though they had lived their span.
And death for thee had glory brought to them.
Nor have they any child save thee, nor hope.
Aged as they are, of other progeny.
So thou and I might have lived out our time,
So thou hadst not been of thy wife bereft ;
Nor had our children been left motherless.
Well, be it so, since heaven has thus decreed.
Now gratefully requite my sacrifice ;
I ask not full repayment of my debt,
Nothing is full repayment for a life,
I ask but for my due. If to thy heart
Our children are as dear as to mine own,
Master and mistress here still let them be,
And set above their heads no step-mother,
Who, being not so good a wife as I,
May on our offspring lay a cruel hand.
Do not so, I entreat thee from my heart ;
For to the children of the former wife
A step-dame is a viper, nothing less.
The boy has a strong bulwark in his sire,
With whom he may free conversation hold :

But who, my girl, will tend thy maidenhood?
What will thy father's consort be to thee?
Will she not spread some ill report abroad
To blight thy youthful hope in wedlock's hour?
I ne'er shall lead thee to the bride-chamber;
In childbirth I shall not be there to cheer,
When a good mother's presence is most prized,
For I must die, must die this very day;
Not on some distant morrow, but this day
Alcestis goes to those that are no more.
Blessings wait on ye all; ye well may say
That never man had truer wife, nor child
A better mother than is lost in me.

CHORUS.

Be of good cheer. I answer for my lord
That, well advised, he will thy bidding do.

ADMETUS.

It shall be done, fear not; as living thou
My wife hast been, so dead thou still shalt be;
Thou and thou only; no Thessalian bride
Shall ever lip the name that thou hast used,
Were she the noblest blood of Thessaly,
And of Thessalian dames the fairest one.
Of children I desire no more; may heaven
Give me in these the joy I lose in thee.

(Pointing to the children.)

Not for a single year, beloved wife,
But while Admetus lives he'll mourn for thee,

And will his father and his mother hold
Strange to his heart. They loved in words alone,
While thou hast made love's costliest sacrifice
To save my life. Have not I cause to wail,
When death tears such a partner from my side?
The revelry, the joyous companies,
Music and wreaths my house shall know no more ;
Never again my hand shall touch the harp,
Never again my voice accompany
The jocund flute ; my joy is gone with thee.
Thy image, by a cunning sculptor wrought,
Shall lie upon thy bed, and I will fall
Upon it, and enfold it in my arms,
And call on thy beloved name, and seem
My lost Alcestis to embrace once more.
Cold comfort, truly, this ; yet some relief
To an o'erflowing heart. And in my dreams
Thou'lt come and cheer me. Sweet it is at night
Those whom we love to see, though brief their stay.
Had I, like Orpheus, music's witchery,
Demeter's daughter, or her dusky lord,
To spell-bind and from Hades rescue thee,
To Hades would I go. Not Pluto's hound
Should scare me, nor the ferryman of souls,
But I would lead thee back to life again.
Look for me when my turn shall come to die,
And make our dwelling ready for us both,
For I will cause my body to be laid
In that same cedarn chest where thou dost lie,
My loving side joined to thy loving side.

Thou only faithful hast been found to me,
Dear wife ; death shall not part thee from my love.

CHORUS.

I too my share in thy affliction claim,
And well the lady doth deserve our tears.

ALCESTIS.

My children, ye have heard your father's pledge
Never to set a step-dame over you,
Or thrust me from the allegiance of his heart.

ADMETUS.

What now I say shall never be unsaid.

ALCESTIS.

Then here our children I entrust to thee.

ADMETUS.

And I receive them as the gage of love.

ALCESTIS.

Be thou a mother to them in my place.

ADMETUS.

Need were, when such a mother has been lost.

ALCESTIS.

Children, I leave you when I fain would live.

ADMETUS.

Alas ! what shall I do, bereft of thee ?

ALCESTIS.

Time will assuage thy grief ; the dead are nought.

ADMETUS.

Take, take me with thee to the underworld.

ALCESTIS.

It is enough that I must die for thee.

ADMETUS.

O Heaven ! of what a partner I am reft !

ALCESTIS.

My eyes grow dim and the long sleep comes on.

ADMETUS.

I too am lost if thou dost leave me, wife.

ALCESTIS.

Think of me as of one that is no more.

ADMETUS.

Lift up thy face, quit not thy children dear.

ALCESTIS.

Not willingly ; but, children, fare ye well.

ADMETUS.

O look upon them, look !

ALCESTIS.

My end is come.

ADMETUS.

O leave us not.

ALCESTIS.

Farewell.

ADMETUS.

I am undone.

CHORUS.

Gone, gone ; thy wife, Admetus, is no more.

ALCESTIS IS RESTORED TO HER HUSBAND.

Hercules has wrestled with Death and rescued Alcestis. He brings her back veiled to Admetus.

LINES 1008-1153.

HERCULES.

Friends, my Admetus, should be frank with friends,
And never hide their grief within their hearts.
Then, frankly, I had thought that I should rank
As thy true comrade in adversity.

And yet thou didst not tell me that thy wife
Lay dead, but didst receive me as thy guest,
As though it were a loss that touched thee not.
I crowned my head with flowers, and to the gods
Poured my libation in thy mourning home.
This pains me, friend, it pains me ; let it pass,
I would not in thy sorrow trouble thee.
The cause of this my second visit learn ;
I'd have thee keep this damsel safe for me,
Till I have yon Bistonian tyrant slain,
And hither with the Thracian steeds returned.
Should I miscarry, which may heaven forbend,
Thyself shall keep her as thy handmaiden.
Not without worthy effort was she won ;
I came where some a public tourney held,
And prizes were set up for strength and speed,
Thence brought I this reward of victory ;
For lighter contests horses were the prize ;
For boxing and for wrestling 'twas a herd
Of oxen, and a damsel therewithal.
For shame I could not such achievement miss.
Then take the damsel to thy special care,
I stole her not but fought for her ; one day,
Perchance, thyself shall say that I did well.

ADMETUS.

'Twas not through coldness or disparagement
That I concealed from thee my heavy dole,
But grief would have been added unto grief
Hadst thou been lodged in any house but mine.

For my calamity my tears sufficed.
But for this damsel, good my lord, I pray
Give her in trust to some Thessalian chief
Who has not lost what I have ; friends enow
'Thou hast in Pheræ ; wake not sleeping grief.
Looking upon this woman in my home,
I could not choose but weep. Then do not add
Fresh smart to smart ; I have enough of woe.
Where could this damsel fitting lodgment find ?
That she is young, her garb and trinkets show.
Can she in the men's quarters be bestowed ?
How should she go unharmed among young men ?
To curb youth's passions, Hercules, is hard,
And I'd not have thy trust in me betrayed.
Shall she be lodged in my dead consort's bower ?
How can I lay her on the lost one's bed ?
My people first will heap reproach on me
For falling from her love that saved my life,
To the embraces of a paramour.
And then I should be recreant to the dead,
Who claims my heart's allegiance. Thou, fair maid,
Whoever thou may'st be, in height and form
Thou art Alcestis' very counterpart.
Ah me ! remove this damsel from my sight ;
Slay not afresh the man whom grief has slain ;
For as I look on her I think I see
The wife that I have lost ; my heart beats fast,
And from mine eyes gush floods of tears. Alas !
Now first I taste the bitterness of woe.

CHORUS.

I cannot deem thee happy in this chance,
Yet what heaven sends, we mortals must endure.

HERCULES.

O that these thews and sinews could bring back
Thy wife to-day from the abodes below !
How gladly would I win this boon for thee.

ADMETUS.

Thy will I know full well, but where's the way ?
The dead may see the light of day no more.

HERCULES.

Lament not above measure ; calm thy soul.

ADMETUS.

'Tis easier to preach patience than to bear.

HERCULES.

It boots not, though thou shouldst forever groan.

ADMETUS.

I know it, but my sorrow masters me.

HERCULES.

Love of the dead finds always vent in tears.

ADMETUS.

More utter is my wreck than words can tell.

HERACLES.

Great is thy loss ; that no man can deny.

ADMETUS.

So great that life for me hath charms no more.

HERACLES.

Time will bring balm ; thy wound as yet is green.

ADMETUS.

Time will bring balm to me, if time is death.

HERACLES.

Another woman's love will be the cure.

ADMETUS.

Speak not of that to me ; I loathe the thought.

HERACLES.

How? Art thou then resolved to wed no more?

ADMETUS.

She lives not that shall be my bed-fellow.

HERACLES.

And how will this do good to her that's gone?

ADMETUS.

Where'er Alcestis be, my heart is hers.

HERACLES.

'Twas bravely said, and yet 'tis folly, friend.

ADMETUS.

Praise me as one that never will wed more.

HERACLES.

I praise thee as a faithful widower.

ADMETUS.

When I to her prove traitor, may I die.

HERACLES.

Receive this damsel in thy noble halls.

ADMETUS.

By Zeus, thy father, press not this on me.

HERACLES.

Great is thy error if thou dost it not.

ADMETUS.

And great will be my anguish if I do.

HERACLES.

Consent ; the favour may be well bestowed.

ADMETUS.

I would that thou hadst never won this prize.

HERACLES.

Yet when I win, thou dost my winnings share.

ADMETUS.

It is well said, but let the maid begone.

HERACLES.

She shall, but first see whether it is good.

ADMETUS.

It is, if only thou wilt not be wrath.

HERACLES.

I have my reasons for this urgency.

ADMETUS.

Have then thy way, albeit I like it not.

HERACLES.

In time thou'lt like it well. Only comply.

ADMETUS.

Lead in the maid ; receive her if we must.

HERACLES.

I trust her not to an attendant's care.

ADMETUS.

Yourself, then, if you choose, may lead her in.

HERACLES.

To your own hand I must commit the maid.

ADMETUS.

I touch her not ; but let her enter there.

HERACLES.

I can trust nothing but thy own right hand.

ADMETUS.

My lord, thou dost constrain me to this act.

HERACLES.

Put forth thy hand ; take hold upon the maid.

ADMETUS.

I do, and think I touch a Gorgon's head.

HERACLES.

Hast thou her hand?

ADMETUS.

I have.

HERACLES.

Then hold it fast,
And thou shalt say I am a worthy guest.

(Unveils the Woman.)

Look on her ; see if she in aught thy wife
Resembles, and embrace thy happiness.

ADMETUS.

Ye gods ! What can this be ? A miracle !
Is it my wife indeed that I behold ?
Or is it but some mockery of heaven ?

HERACLES.

It is no mockery, but thy wife indeed.

ADMETUS.

May it not be some phantom from the dead ?

HERACLES.

'Tis not thy guest's vocation to raise ghosts.

ADMETUS.

Can it be she, whom in her grave I laid ?

HERACLES.

'Tis she, albeit thy doubt is natural.

ADMETUS.

And may I touch, accost her as my wife.

HERACLES.

Thou may'st, and count thy dearest wish fulfilled.

ADMETUS.

O face and form of her I love the most
I clasp, what I had thought to clasp no more.

HERACLES.

Thou dost ; heaven smile upon thy happiness.

ADMETUS.

O glorious son of Zeus omnipotent,
May'st thou be ever blest, and in thy sire
The saviour find that I have found in thee.
How didst thou bring my queen to life again?

HERACLES.

The master fiend I fought and overthrew.

ADMETUS.

Where didst thou thus in fight encounter Death?

HERACLES.

Ambush'd behind the tomb, I sprang on him.

ADMETUS.

Fain would I know why stands my wife thus mute.

HERACLES.

Her voice thou mayst not hear, till to the gods
That rule the dead her rites she has performed
In order due, and the third day has come ;
But lead her in ; and, as in all things else,
Admetus, thou art just, be just to guests.
Farewell ; I go to the appointed toil
Laid on me by the son of Sthenilus.

ADMETUS.

Abide with me, and be our honoured guest.

HERACLES.

Another day ; but now I am in haste.

ADMETUS.

Go in a happy hour and safe return.
Now I proclaim to the whole tetrarchy,
And all who dwell therein, a festal day
Of merry dance and grateful sacrifice.
This hour begins for us a happier life,
Since the kind gods have given me back my wife.

THE SUPPLIANTS.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND DESPOTISM.

A HERALD from Thebes, the enemy in historic times of democracy and Athens, pleads for monarchy, while Theseus, as an Athenian, pleads for a free commonwealth.

LINES 399-462.

HERALD.

Who of this land is lord? Who will receive
The message that I bring from Creon, King
Of Thebes, since Eteocles at our gates
Was by his brother, Polynices, slain?

THESEUS.

Upon the very threshold of thy speech
Thou stumblest, friend, in asking for our lord.
Lord know we none ; this commonwealth is free,
The people here by turns themselves bear rule
In annual rotation. Nor has wealth
A privilege ; the poor are as the rich.

HERALD.

Thou in our game at once hast given me odds.
The State, whose errand I am here to do,
Is ruled by one, not by a multitude.
With us no flatterer puffs the rabble up
And turns it every way for his own ends.
No orator, whose charming eloquence
Has led to ruin, by fresh calumnies,
Covers his failure and escapes his due.
How can a crowd, to judge of arguments
Incapable, direct the State aright?
Deliberate council ever is the best,
And haste is wisdom's bane. Your common hind,
Had he more knowledge, is too much engrossed
With his own work to study policy.
The State must to the better sort seem sick,
When one of no repute, by wordy arts
Captures the gaping crowd and mounts to power.

THESEUS.

Our herald is a politician sage.
Since thou this controversy hast begun,
Hear my reply ; thou art the challenger.
There is no evil like a despot's rule,
For under it there is no public law ;
The despot has the law in his own breast,
And this is fatal to equality.
Where there are written laws, justice is one
For rich and poor. The lowliest citizen,

If wealth assails him, can retort the charge,
And weakness wins with justice on its side.
'Tis freedom's voice that calls on all who will,
To give good counsel to the commonwealth.
He that can speak wins favour ; who will not,
Sits silent. What can fairer be than this?
Then, where the people has the mastery,
It looks with favour on aspiring youth ;
But nothing is more hateful to a king,
Who puts to death the men of intellect,
Lest they conspire against his sovereignty.
How can a commonwealth be powerful
When its bold spirits and its rising hopes,
Like a mead's choicest blossoms, are mown down?
What man would store up substance for his heirs,
Only to fill a tyrant's treasury?
Or bring up daughters in a virtuous home,
Only to pander to a tyrant's lust
With tears to them that feed it? Life's a curse
Where daughters are the brides of violence.
Thus have I shot thy arrow back again.
Now do thy errand. 'Twould go hard with thee
And thy superfluous talk had not thy State
Named thee its envoy. 'Tis a herald's part
His message to deliver and begone.
Henceforth if Creon needs ambassadors,
Let him find some less garrulous than thee.

ION.

ION is the son of Cræusa, an Athenian lady who has been embraced by Apollo. She exposes the child, which finds its way to Delphi, and is brought up there as a servant of the Temple of Apollo. The boy is afterwards recognised by his mother and by Xuthus, Lord of Athens, whom she has since married. It is morning, the Temple service opens, Ion chants as he performs his duties of sweeping the Temple, sprinkling the holy water from Castalia, and driving away the birds.

LINES 82-183.

ION.

With his bright steeds now the sun
Has his daily course begun,
And the stars before his light
Hide them in the womb of night.
Thy soaring peaks, Parnassus, now
The fiery chariot's glory show ;
Fragrant clouds of incense sweet,
Phœbus, fill thy holy seat ;
The priestess, on her mission high,
Mounts the chair of prophecy,

There to Hellas to make known
Whate'er Apollo has foreshown.
Ye that dwell in Delphian home,
Liegemen of Apollo, come
To the fount of Castaly,
From its wave draw purity,
Then unto the temple hie.
See that no ill-omened word
From unguarded lips be heard,
When ye to the pilgrims speak
Who the shrine prophetic seek.
Mine the task once more shall be,
As ever from my infancy,
With laurel bough to sweep the ground,
Sprinkle the holy water round,
And with my bow the birds to chase,
'That would defile the sacred place.
Father or mother have I none,
Ion is the temple's son.
Come then, my fair laurel bough,
That in flowery dale dost grow,
Fed by springs that ever flow,
And with the myrtle there dost twine,
For service of Apollo's shrine. —
Come, with thee the fane I sweep,
And from all defilement keep.
So, with each returning sun,
Ion's task is duly done.
Praise and glory be to thee,
Fair Latona's progeny.

Phœbus, happy lot is mine
To wait on thy prophetic shrine.
No mortal master do I own,
The servant I of heaven alone.
Of labour that is piety
Weary I can never be.
Phœbus is my father true,
To him my grateful love is due ;
From him to me all blessings come,
Phœbus, whose temple is my home.
Praise and glory be to thee,
Fair Latona's progeny.
Now, my first task fully plied,
My laurel bough I lay aside,
And from the golden urn I fling
Water from Castalian spring,
Pure myself, on all around
To purify the temple's bound.
Phœbus the lot must happy be,
That makes me wish to part from thee.
But lo ! the birds are leaving now
Their nests on high Parnassus' brow ;
I rede them all to keep aloof
From golden shrine and corniced roof.
Thou that heaven's messages dost bear,
Whose talons make thee lord of air,
Beware my arrows. Here again
A swan comes sailing to the fane.
Turn, ruddy-foot, elsewhere thy flight ;
Go, upon Delian waters light ;

Though sweet as Phœbus' lyre, thy strain
To save thee from my bow were vain.
That throat from which pours forth the flood
Of music will be dyed with blood.
Behold ! behold ! here comes a third
Winging its way, a stranger bird.
Think'st thou to build beneath this roof?
Hark to my bowstring ; keep aloof.
Hence ! to Alpheius' bank repair,
Or to the Isthmian glade, and there
Thy young ones hatch, but let this fane,
These statues, undefiled remain.
Birds that interpret heaven's high will
To mortals, I am loath to kill.
Yet Ion must his duty do,
And prove him Phœbus' liegeman true,
Beneath whose roof his childhood grew.

*THE CHOICE BETWEEN PUBLIC AND
RETIRED LIFE.*

Xuthus invites Ion to come with him to Athens, where he will give him a splendid position. Ion discusses the proposal, and in so doing draws a picture of public and social life at Athens.

LINES 569-647.

XUTHUS.

Heaven's favour has revealed thy birth, my child,
To me, and once more linked thee to my love ;

Thou, too, hast found thy friends, before unknown ;
But thou sayest rightly, and with thee I wish
That thou shouldst now learn who thy mother was,
And I should learn to whom I owe my son ;
This in due time with patience may be known.
Now leave the temple, leave thy homeless life,
And as thy father's son to Athens come,
Where a paternal sceptre waits for thee
And wealth enow ; where thou no more shalt feel
The double bane of bastardy and want,
But shalt have riches with nobility.
Why art thou mute ? Why look'st thou on the ground ?
Art lost in thought ? Why, in this hour of joy,
Dost meet thy father with a face of fear ?

ION.

Things which when seen from far one aspect have,
On nearer view another look assume ;
In that I have a father found in thee
I count myself most happy. But now learn
My thought. 'Tis said that the Athenian race
Is native to the soil, not immigrant ;
Intruding there, I shall two drawbacks feel,
As bastard offspring of a foreigner.
Disparaged thus, if with a low estate
I rest content, I shall be scorned of all ;
If with ambition fired, the helm of state
I seek to grasp, detested I shall be
By those beneath me : hatred dogs the great ;
While worthy men who in debate might shine,

Yet stand aloof from the affairs of state,
 Will take me for a fool and scoff at me
 For stirring in a land of calumny.
 By men of mark again and aspirants,
 Myself aspiring, I shall still be checked
 With jealous opposition ; so it is
 That they who hold the power and primacy
 Are bitter foes to rivals in the race.
 Then, coming as a stranger to thy home,
 And to thy childless wife, who heretofore
 Has shared with thee the grief of barrenness,
 And must henceforth bear her reproach alone,
 When she beheld me standing by thy side,
 The darling of thy heart, herself forlorn,
 How should I not be hateful in her eyes ?
 So must thou cleave to her, discarding me,
 Or, me preferring, fill thy home with strife.
 How oft, with deadly steel or poisoned cup,
 Has the dishonoured wife avenged her wrong ?
 Besides, my sire, I must true pity feel
 For thy good consort, childless in her age ;
 Highborn, she ill may brook disparagement.
 And for that lordship which is falsely prized,
 Fair though its outward aspect be, within
 It is but misery ; how can he be blessed
 Who lives from hour to hour in mortal fear
 Of the assassin ? May a lowly lot,
 With happiness, not lordly state, be mine.
 Who holds that state must take bad men for friends
 And shun the good on peril of his life.

Gold, thou wilt say, makes up for all, and wealth
Is happiness. Happy I ne'er could be
If riches brought me hate and carking care.
A middle state, from trouble free, be mine.
Now, father, learn what were my blessings here.
The first was leisure, dear to all men's hearts,
With quiet, nor did hustling villainy
E'er thrust me from my path. Past sufferance
It is to give way to unworthiness.
In holy rite or human intercourse
I ministered to joy, never to grief;
I hailed the coming, sped the parting guest,
Thus fresh to all while each was fresh to me.
All men would fain be righteous e'en perforce,
And I walked righteously before the god
By law and nature both. On all which grounds,
My sire, I rather choose this present lot.
Then let me live the life I list, for bliss
In littleness or greatness is the same.

ELECTRA.

Orestes moralises on the relation between birth or rank and virtue.

LINES 367-390.

ORESTES.

Virtue is by no outward mark discerned,
Nor can we gauge the characters of men ;
We oft see worthless sons of noble sires
And worthy children of the unworthy born,
A rich man that hath hunger in his soul,
And generous aspiration in the poor.
By what criterion can we praise aright?
By wealth? That were a most misleading test.
By poverty? That hath its maladies,
And leads to wickedness by desperate need.
By deeds of war? Who as he fronts the spear
Has calmness truly to discern the brave?
'Tis best to leave these questions unresolved.
There stands a man whom Argos counts not great,
Swollen with no pride of an illustrious line,
Lowly, and yet in merit eminent.
Ye, then, who err, with idle fancies filled,

Dismiss your folly ; learn by intercourse
And character to judge nobility.
Such are good men and useful citizens ;
But your fair forms of flesh without a soul
Are statues in the forum. The strong arm
Meets shock of war no better than the weak.
All lies in native worth and gallantry.

THE BACCHÆ.

PENTHEUS, King of Thebes, seeks to put down the new worship of Dionysus, which is turning the heads of his female subjects. The offended god persuades him to dress himself up as a Bacchante, that he may pry into the mysteries. In this garb, Dionysus, under the disguise of a stranger, leads him to the mountains, and there delivers him into the hands of the mad horde of Bacchantes, who tear him limb from limb. A slave, who had gone with him, tells the story.

THE FATE OF PENTHEUS.

LINES 1043-1152.

MESSENGER.

Therapne in Bœotia left behind,
Asopus' stream when we had overpassed,
We found ourselves among Cithæron's crags,
Pentheus, with me attendant, and that guide
Unknown that led us to the spectacle.
There first we couched us in a grassy glade,
All keeping silence, and with noiseless tread
Moving, that we might see and not be seen.

A glen there was between steep cliffs with pine
O'erarched and traversed by a mountain stream.
There sat the Mænads, daintily employed,
For some of them, whose wands had been worn out,
Were with fresh ivy weaving them anew ;
And some, as blithe as steer released from yoke,
Were singing to each other Bacchic strains.
Then Pentheus, ill-starred, seeing not the crowd
Of women, said, " O stranger, where we are
My eyes the Mænads' antics cannot scan,
But could I mount a cliff or some tall pine
I might o'erlook the whole foul mystery."
A wonder then I saw the stranger work.
He took the topmost bough of a tall pine
And drew it down, down, till it touched the earth.
As when a bow is bent, or when a wheel
Is fashioned to its curve upon the lathe,
So did the stranger bow that mountain pine
Down to the earth. It was a miracle.
Pentheus he placed upon the topmost branch,
Then loosed the pine and let it rise again,
Gently, for fear of its unseating him.
Erect the pine stood up against the sky,
Bearing astride upon its branch my lord,
Who thus himself was seen rather than saw.
And now the stranger vanished ; but a voice,
The voice of Dionysus seemingly,
Was heard from heaven : " Lo I have brought," he said,
" Maidens, the man who mocks at you and me
And at my mysteries ; take your revenge."

Thus as he spake, he made o'er earth and sky
To spread a fiery blaze of awful light.
Silence was in the heavens, in the green glen
Not a leaf whispered, and all beasts were still.
The women, that had scarcely heard the voice,
All started to their feet and gazed around ;
Again the call was uttered. Knowing, then,
That Bacchus summoned them, the Theban maids,
As swift as is the flight of fleetest dove,
Agave, the King's mother, at their head,
With both her sisters and the Mænads all,
Came coursing on along the torrent's bed.
Beneath the crags they bounded, frenzy-driven.
When, sitting on the tree, my lord they spied,
They first climbed up on a commanding rock,
And from that vantage cast huge stones at him,
Or pelted him with branches torn from pines,
While others hurled their wands like javelins
At their doomed quarry ; but they struck him not,
Fain as they were, for high above their reach
In desperate plight sat the ill-fated King.
At last, with branches torn from oaks in place
Of crow-bars, they the roots strove to upheave.
But when they found their efforts all were vain,
Agave cried, " Come, close around the tree
And pull, ye Mænads ; let us catch the beast
Mounted thereon, that he may ne'er divulge
Our mysteries." Then with countless hands they
grasped
The pine, and with main force uprooted it.

Pentheus from where he sat on high fell down,
A parlous fall, and fast his piteous cries
Poured forth ; too well he knew destruction near.
His priestess mother led the murderous work,
Falling upon him. From his head he plucks
The turban, that Agave, knowing him,
May spare his life, and cries, touching her cheek,
“ Mother, behold, Pentheus thy son am I,
Whom in Eëtion’s mansion thou didst bear ;
Spare me then, O my mother, and slay not
For my offence the fruit of thy own womb.”
She, foaming at the mouth, and with her eyes
Rolling in frenzy, out of her right mind,
By Bacchus was possessed. Vain was his prayer.
She with main force laid hold of his left arm,
And, her foot planted on his hapless side,
Tore off his shoulder ; not by her own strength,
But through the power which the god granted her.
Ino was on the other side at work
Tearing the flesh, and with Autonoe
The whole horde fell upon him. Loud the din.
He groaned with all the life left him, while they
Shouted exultant ; one bore off an arm,
And one a foot, sandal and all ; his bones
Were stript, and every hand encarnadined
Tossed to and fro some strip of Pentheus’ flesh.
Beneath the crags part of his body lies,
And part beneath the forest’s leafy shade,
Not easy to be found. The victim’s head,
Falling into his mother’s hands, by her

Was fixed on her wand's point as it had been
A lion's, and about Cithæron borne,
While she her sisters with the Mænads left.
Now, in her ghastly trophy triumphing,
These walls she enters, shouting Bacchus' name,
As her victorious partner in the chase
And in the prize ; woe worth the victory !
I from the hideous spectacle withdraw
Before Agave can this mansion reach.
Reverencè discreet for sacred mysteries
Is still, methinks, the soundest policy,
And so will all men by experience find.

HECUBA.

AFTER the fall of Troy, the ghost of Achilles appears and proclaims that before the departure of the army for home his shade must be appeased by the blood of one of the Trojan captives. It is decided that Polyxena, the young and beautiful daughter of Hecuba, shall be the victim. She is accordingly taken from her mother and sacrificed.

THE PARTING.

Ulysses comes to take Polyxena from her mother Hecuba and lead her away to the altar of sacrifice.

LINES 218-440.

ULYSSES.

Lady, what the Achæan host resolves
Thou hast, I ween, already heard. But know
It is decreed that thy Polyxena
Shall on Achilles' tomb be sacrificed.
Ourselves are here depute to seek the maid
And lead her to the spot ; Achilles' son
Is chosen to perform the sacrifice.

Now listen ; force me not to tear the maid
From thy embrace, nor strive with me in vain,
But know thy weakness and thy fall'n estate ;
When fortune fails 'tis something to be wise.

HECUBA.

Alas ! a bitter trial is at hand,
One that brings many a groan and many a tear.
Death passed me over when to die was best,
And Zeus hath spared me only to endure
Worse upon worse, an endless train of woe.
But if the slave may to the free address
Questions not galling nor impertinent,
I crave an intermission of thy speech,
And to my questions pray thee to give ear.

ULYSSES.

Ask what thou wilt, for I have time enow.

HECUBA.

Rememberest thou who came to Ilium
A spy disguised in rags, while from his eyes
The bloody rheum ran trickling o'er his chin ?

ULYSSES.

I do ; 'tis deeply graven on my heart.

HECUBA.

And Helen knew thee and told me alone.

ULYSSES.

Great was our peril ; we forget it not.

HECUBA.

And didst thou, bending low, embrace my knees?

ULYSSES.

My hand was numbed with clinging to thy robe.

HECUBA.

What didst thou say, then, when thou wert my thrall?

ULYSSES.

Much which my wit devised to save my life.

HECUBA.

And was it I preserved and let thee go?

ULYSSES.

Yea ; 'tis to thee I owe it that I live.

HECUBA.

Art thou not then ashamed of thy design
When, having met such treatment at my hands,
Thou dost return me evil for my good?
A graceless set are ye that court applause
By popular harangues. Save me from you
Who care not how much wrong ye do your friends
So ye gain favour with the multitude.

Say, what so subtle argument was there
For voting the death sentence of my child ?
The seemliness of human sacrifice
At graves where oxen might more fitly bleed ?
Or did Achilles call for vengeance due
In slaying those by whom himself was slain ?
This maiden never did him injury.
For Helen's blood he well might call ; 'twas she
Drew him to Troy and brought him to his doom.
If some choice captive was to die, the flower
Of all in beauty, this concerned not us ;
For Tyndaris was fairest of the fair,
And her offence had been no less than ours.
Such in the name of justice is my plea.
Now listen to the plea of gratitude.
That thou didst sue for life to my right hand
And to my aged cheek, thou dost confess.
I to thy hand and to thy cheek now sue.
I of my service crave return, and pray
That this my child may not be torn from me
And done to death. There have been deaths enough.
She is my joy, the solace of my woes ;
She is my comfort for the many lost ;
She is my country, nurse, and staff, and guide.
Might should not do the thing that right abhors,
Nor should the prosperous think no change can come.
I once was something that am nothing now ;
A single day reft all my happiness.
Look, gracious friend upon my fall'n estate
And pity me. Go, to the Achæan host

Put forth thy eloquence, show them 'twere vile
To slay the women whom your pity spared
When from the altars they were torn away ;
And in your commonwealth the law of blood
Is equal for the freeman and the slave.
'Thy character, e'en if thy cause be weak,
Will weigh, far different is the power of words
Uttered by man of high repute and none.

CHORUS.

There is no heart in human breast so hard
That, hearing these thy lamentable wails
And piteous outcries, could refrain from tears.

ULYSSES.

Learn wisdom, Hecuba ; let not thy wrath
Make enemies of those who mean your good.
Thyself, to whom I owe escape from death,
I am resolved to save, of that be sure ;
My public counsel I will not recant
To grant our first of warriors, now that Troy
Is ours, thy daughter as a sacrifice.
It is the bane of many a commonwealth
That to the good and patriot citizen
No more than to the worthless herd is given.
High honour, Queen, is to Achilles due
That gloriously his life for Hellas gave.
'Twere base to use a friend while he is ours,
And care for him no more when he is gone.
What think you men will do if e'er again

The mustering and the call to arms should come?
Shall we fight well, or shall we spare our blood,
Seeing no honour paid to him that falls?
For my part, while I live I am content
With what I have, small though my portion be,
But I would have an honourable tomb
To keep my memory fresh in after times.
Thou'dst say thy lot is hard ; bethink thee then
That we too many an aged mother have
And father whose bereavement equals thine,
And widows that for gallant husbands mourn,
Whose bodies mingle with Idæan dust.
Have patience, if we fail aright the brave
To honour, all will think we play the fool.
My country's foes, be void of gratitude,
And pay no homage to the glorious dead,
So shall our Hellas prosper at your cost
And ye shall fare as fits such policy.

CHORUS.

Alas ! how miserable is slavery,
Which ever bows its head perforce to wrong.

HECUBA.

Daughter, I see my pleadings in thy cause
Are spent in vain and scattered to the winds.
If thou hast power more than thy mother has,
Bestir thee, trilling like a nightingale
Thy melancholy notes to save thy life.
Fall humbly down and clasp Ulysses' knees,

And, if thou canst, prevail. Ulysses too
A father is and he may pity thee.

POLYXENA.

Ulysses, thou art hiding thy right hand
Beneath thy robe, turning away thy face,
Lest I should touch thy chin. Dismiss thy fear ;
The suppliant's god thou shalt not wrong in me.
I will go with thee, both because I must
And because death is welcome. Were it not,
I were a craven. What is life to me ?
My father was wide Phrygia's sovereign lord ;
To such estate an heiress was I born ;
To such imperial promise was I bred,
The destined bride of royalty, the source
Of rivalries to suitors many an one.
I moved a queen among Idæan maids,
The envy and the mirror of them all,
A goddess, saving by mortality.
And now I am a slave ; that name at once,
Strange to my pride, would make me long to die ;
Then might I to some cruel master fall,
Bought with his gold, I that the sister was
To Hector and that noble brotherhood,
And might, by him to menial service put,
Bake for him, sweep his house, or ply his loom,
And thus drag out my days in misery.
A slave might be my mate and press the bed
Of her that should have been the bride of kings.
Never ; a freewoman I'll render up

My life and give this body to the grave.
Lead me away, Ulysses, to my death ;
Lead me away. Here is no ray of hope
That happiness will e'er be mine again.
And mother, strive not thou to hold me back
By word or act ; rather encourage me
Bravely to die before dishonour's day.
They who have never known adversity
May wear the yoke, but they are galled by it.
Far happier is it to be rid of life
When life's a load of shame and misery.

CHORUS.

How wondrous is the mint mark stamped on men
Of noble birth ! Those worthy of their race
Still better a proud name by prouder deeds.

HECUBA.

Brave words, my child, but in their bravery
Is that which wrings my heart. If Peleus' son
Must be appeased, and Hellas from reproach
Be freed, Ulysses, do not kill this maid ;
Me, rather, me lead where Achilles lies,
And stab me ; spare me not, I Paris bore,
Whose arrow laid the son of Thetis low.

ULYSSES.

'Tis for this maiden's blood and not for thine,
Lady, that from the dead Achilles calls.

HECUBA.

Let us then die together, so the grave
And he whose shade demands the sacrifice
Shall quaff a double drink-offering of blood.

ULYSSES.

The daughter's death suffices ; two to slay
Were one too much — and one is all too much.

HECUBA.

It must be so ; I'll share my daughter's grave.

ULYSSES.

How must ? I know no master in this case.

HECUBA.

As ivy cleaves to oak I'll cleave to her.

ULYSSES.

That wilt thou not if thou wilt hear the wise.

HECUBA.

Nothing but force shall part me from my child.

ULYSSES.

And I will not go hence and leave her here.

POLYXENA.

Mother, give way. And thou, Laertes' son,
Deal kindly with a parent's wounded heart.

Dear lady, strive not with o'ermastering power.
Would'st thou that they should cast thee on the ground,
And bruise thy aged flesh with violence,
Shamefully hauling thee with younger hands?
For this would be thy fate. O tempt it not.
Beloved mother, give me thy dear hand
And let thy cheek touch mine in close embrace,
For nevermore shall I behold the sun :
The night of death is now begun for me ;
These are the last words I shall speak to thee.
Mother, a long farewell ; I go to die.

HECUBA.

And I, my daughter—I shall live a slave.

POLYXENA.

Ill-starred I ne'er shall see my marriage hour.

HECUBA.

Wretched art thou, more wretched still am I.

POLYXENA.

In Hades I shall lie apart from thee.

HECUBA.

What shall I do? how shall I end my life?

POLYXENA.

A daughter of the free, I die a slave.

HECUBA.

And I, bereaved of fifty children, die.

POLYXENA.

What shall I say to Hector or thy lord?

HECUBA.

Say I am wretchedest of woman-kind.

POLYXENA.

O breast that sweetly nursed my infancy !

HECUBA.

O hapless daughter, reft before thine hour !

POLYXENA.

Mother, farewell. Cassandra, fare thee well.

HECUBA.

Farewell, who may ; ill must thy mother fare.

POLYXENA.

And Polydorus, he whom Thracia holds.

HECUBA.

Ah ! if he lives. But my sad heart misgives.

POLYXENA.

He lives, be sure, and he will close thine eyes.

HECUBA.

I die before my death, by sorrow slain.

POLYXENA.

Lead me away, Ulysses, veil my head ;
My mother's lamentations pierce my heart
Before the knife, and mine are piercing hers.
Light of the sun, I still may call on thee,
But shall not share thee more save while I pass
From slaughter to Achilles' funeral pyre.

HECUBA.

Alas ! I faint ; my limbs sink under me.
O child, give me thy hand, thy hand, I pray ;
Leave me not childless. I am lost ! am lost !

CHORUS OF TROJAN CAPTIVES.

LINES 444-483.

CHORUS.

Breezes, breezes of the sea,
Whither will ye carry me ?
For what house of slavery
Bound across the foam am I
In the flying barque ? A thrall,
Whom shall I my master call ?
Shall I go to Dorian strand,
Or to the far Phliatian land,

Where stream far-famed, through fruitful meads
Apidanus his waters leads,
Borne, hapless one, across the brine
All my life long in bonds to pine?
Or to the isle where legends say
The new-born palm and sacred bay
Over Latona's child-bed throes
Divine, to grace and shelter rose.
Shall I with the Delian maids
Chant thy bow, thy golden braids,
Artemis, or ply the loom
A handmaid, Pallas, in thy home,
There broider on thy robe the car
That bears thee glorious to the war,
Or conquering Zeus, whose thunder hurled
The Titans to the under world?
Alas for sire and child, my dear ones all,
For that fallen city wrapped in smoky pall.
Asia is Europe's slave ; I leave her shore
Wedded to death, a slave forevermore.

THE DEATH OF POLYXENA.

Talthybius, the Herald, narrates the sacrifice of Polyxena to the shade of Achilles.

LINES 483-582.

TALTHYBIUS.

Ye Trojan maidens, tell me where to find
Hecuba, sometime Queen of Ilium.

CHORUS.

Yonder she lies, Talthybius, outstretched
Upon the ground, and folded in her robes.

TALTHYBIUS.

Zeus ! What am I to think ? Dost thou look down
Upon the ways of men, or have we dreamed
An idle dream in fancying there are gods,
And is it chance that rules the lives of men ?
Was not this lady Queen of Phrygia's wealth ?
Was she not partner of great Priam's state ?
Now war has laid her royal city low,
While she a slave and childless in her age
With her grey hairs lies weltering in the dust.
Short is the time for suffering left to me,
Yet suffering to avoid I'd gladly die.
O lady, from thy bed of sorrows rise,
Lift up thy aged form, thy hoary head.

HECUBA.

And who is he that does invade my grief,
And will not let me lie where I have fallen ?

TALTHYBIUS.

Talthybius, herald to the Danaans ;
By Agamemnon am I sent to thee.

HECUBA.

Thrice welcome, if thou com'st to bring me word

That I, too, with my daughter am to die.
Let us begone, old man ; quick, lead the way.

TALTHYBIUS.

Nay, 'tis to tend thy daughter's burial
That thou art summoned ; they that sent me are
The Atridæ twain and the Achæan host.

HECUBA.

Alas ! Thou hast not come to bring release
From woe by death, but to bear news of woe.
Daughter, thy mother ne'er shall see thee more ;
No more, alas ! has she a child in thee.
Yet say how ye despatched her. Tenderly?
Or dealt ye with her as an enemy
In ruthless wise ? Tell, though the tale be sad.

TALTHYBIUS.

Lady, thou bidd'st my tears a second time
Flow for thy child ; I wept to see her die,
And now shall weep recounting how she died.
The whole Achæan host around the tomb
Met to behold thy daughter's sacrifice.
Achilles' son then led Polyxena
To the mound's top, and at his side stood I ;
While of Achæan youths a company,
Chosen the victim's struggling to restrain,¹
Mounted behind us. Next Achilles' son

¹ The liberty has been taken here of a little assault on the original.

Held up a golden chalice and poured out
Libation to his father. Then he bade
Silence through all the host to be proclaimed.
So I cried, "Silence, silence through the host!"
And there was silence as when winds are still.
Then said he, "Son of Peleus, father mine,
Take to appease thee this drink offering
That makes the dead come forth; approach and quaff
A virgin's blood, fresh shed and tendered thee
By me and all the host. Be kind to us;
Grant that we may our wind-bound ships unmoor,
And by fair gales from Ilium homeward borne.
See, all of us, again our fatherland."
So prayed he, and the host took up the prayer.
Then laid he hand on his sword's golden hilt
And bared the blade, and to the chosen youths
Made sign to lift the maiden in their arms.
But she, when she perceived the sign, thus spoke:
"O Argives, that have laid my country waste,
I am prepared to die; then touch me not:
I will stretch forth my neck courageously.
Unhand me, I beseech; free was I born,
So freely let me die. Kings are my sires,
Among the dead I would not be a slave."
Then all the people shouted their assent,
And Agamemnon bade let go the maid,
To whose imperial voice obedient
The young men straightway let the maiden go.
And as she heard the king's command go forth,
The maiden rent her robe and let it fall

Down from the shoulder to the middle flank,
So that her breasts were seen, as beautiful,
As are a statue's. Then she bent her knee
And uttered what it moved all hearts to hear :
“ Behold, young prince, if on my breast thee list
To strike, my breast is open to the blow ;
If on my neck, my neck, behold, is bare.”
He, touched with ruth, as one that willing was
And yet unwilling, smote the maiden's throat.
The blood gushed out. She in the throes of death
Took care to fall with virgin decency,
Hiding what ought not to be seen of men.
No sooner had the maiden breathed her last
Than all the host fell busily to work,
And all in divers ways : some plucked fresh leaves
To strew upon the corpse ; some pine-wood brought
To build the funeral pyre, and he who failed
Was taunted as a laggard by the rest :
“ Dost thou stand there, good friend, with empty hands
And bring the maid no robe or ornament ?
Hast thou no tribute for this noble soul,
Bravest of women ? ” So thy daughter died.
Thee count I of all mothers happiest,
And yet most to be pitied of them all.

THE FALL OF TROY.

The capture of Troy by surprise in the night is recounted by a chorus of Trojan women.

LINES 905-952.

CHORUS.

O Ilium ! O my home ! thy name
Th' Unconquered City was of yore ;
A cloud from Hellas o'er thee came :
Unconquered thou art called no more.

The diadem of towers is reft
That once proclaimed thy glorious reign ;
Save blackened ruins naught is left :
I ne'er shall tread thy streets again.

At dead of night destruction came,
When sweet sleep falls on revel's eyes ;
My husband, tired with song and game
And with triumphal sacrifice,

Had stretched him on our nuptial bed.
His trusty spear, its battles o'er,
Was laid to rest above his head ;
He thought to see the foe no more.

And I before the mirror stood
That brightly met my gaze, and tied

My flowing tresses in the snood
That I might lay me by his side.

When through the city went a cry,
The thunder peal of coming doom :
“ O sons of Hellas, fire ye Troy,
So shall ye wend victorious home.”

At once I fled, like Doric maid
Half clad, unto the holy ground
Of Artemis, and there I prayed
For succour, but no succour found.

That night I saw my husband die,
And I, borne o'er the estranging sea,
With fainting heart and wistful eye,
Looked back, my Trojan home, to thee.

Curses on Helen did I heap that hour,
And the Idæan herdsman of her love ;
Their wedlock was no wedlock, but a power
Of hell that me from my dear country drove.
May she to whom I owe an exile's doom
Perish herself and never see her home.

THE PHCENISSÆ.

THE Phœnissæ, so called from the chorus of Phœnician women, again deals with the story of the unnatural brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, who are contending for the sovereignty of Thebes, Eteocles being in possession, while Polynices attacks him with an army raised at Argos, whose king's daughter he had married.

THE CONFERENCE.

An interview of the brothers in the presence of their mother, Jocasta, who has brought them together in the hope of averting their appeal to the sword.

LINES 446-585.

ETEOCLES.

Mother, behold me, for thy sake I come.
What is the business, quickly let us know,
For I in marshalling my companies
Around this town was stayed that I might hear
Thy mediation ; for the which yon chief
Has at thy prayer safe conduct to our walls.

JOCASTA.

Be patient. Speed is never justice' mate :
Slow speech most quickly to wise counsels leads.
Doff that fierce look, control that fuming wrath ;
It is no Gorgon's head lopped from its trunk
'Thou seest before thee, but thy mother's son.
'Thou too, son Polynices, turn this way
And look thy brother in the face, for so
'Thou shalt the better hear and answer him.
I have good counsels, sons, to give ye both.
When friend has been at enmity with friend,
And when they have again met face to face,
Best think of that alone for which they came,
And lay all evil memories aside.
The word, son Polynices, is with thee,
For thou hast hither led the Danaan host,
Having, as thou averrest, suffered wrong.
Heaven, in your quarrel, judge and mediate.

POLYNICES.

Truth still doth use simplicity of speech,
And justice needs no cunning eloquence :
Themselves plead for themselves, while knavery,
Being sick at core, needs drugs to make it sound.
I showed my care for this my father's house
In both our interests, that we might 'scape
The curse called down on us by Œdipus,
By giving up the kingdom for a year ;
After which space I was to reign in turn ;

So to avoid the mortal enmity
And bloody conflict which have now ensued.
To this my brother gave assent and pledged
His oath, yet broke that oath, and now withholds
My share of kingship and our palace home.
Now let me have but that which is my due ;
I will dismiss my army from this land,
Will fairly take my turn of lordship here,
And let yon chief his turn of lordship take ;
Will not my native city storm nor give
Her people up to rapine and the sword,
Which, if denied my right, I shall essay.
Gods of my country, bear me witness all,
That to the utmost I have justice done,
And that most foul injustice banished me.
Such is my case, good mother, not set forth
With curious turns of phrase, but so that all,
Learned or simple, well may understand.

CHORUS.

To me, though not unto the manner born
Of Hellas, thy discourse seems plain enough.

ETEOCLES.

If right and good were in all minds the same
There would be no dissension among men.
But there is no agreement save in names,
In things there is discordance infinite.
Good mother, I will frankly speak my mind :
I'd climb up to the risings of the stars,

Delve to earth's centre if I had the power,
So I might clasp divinest sovereignty.
That prize, good mother mine, if I can keep,
To yield to others is not mine intent :
A weakling he who takes the lesser share,
When he can take the greater. Honour, too,
Forbids to let an armed invader win
What thus he challenges. 'Twere shame to Thebes,
If out of fear of Mycenæan lance,
I gave the sceptre to my brother's hand.
Himself should from th' arbitrament of war
Have shrunk, for reason holds the scales no more
When swords are out and armies plead the cause.
If without empire list him here to dwell,
Here let him dwell. Empire he shall not have ;
While I can reign shall I be that man's slave ?
Come on, then, if ye will, rage fire, flash sword,
Let steeds be yoked and chariots fill the plain,
For I will not my sovereign power resign :
If we must sin we'll sin for sovereignty,
That won, we'll pious be in all besides.

CHORUS.

An evil art it is to glose ill deeds,
A graceless craft abhorred of righteousness.

JOCASTA.

Son Eteocles, not in everything
Is age unfortunate : experience
Has lessons still for froward youth to learn.

Why should'st thou woo, of all the deities,
Ambition? A malignant power is she,
And has in many a happy home and state
Set foot to leave her votaries undone.
Thou'rt mad to court her ; better far, my son,
Worship equality, which friend to friend
Cities and allies to each other binds,
And is the canon of humanity.
Ever between unequals hatred reigns,
The lesser being still the greater's foe.
Of weights, of numbers, and of measurements
Equality is queen and arbitress.
The blind-eyed night and the sun's lucid orb
With equal step pace through the circling year,
And neither feels the pang of jealousy.
When day and night thus stoop to serve mankind,
Shalt thou disdain thy equal share of rule?
This sovereignty, which is but luscious wrong,
Why should'st thou prize so highly, wherefore crave
For state and pomp which are but vanity?
Would'st thou keep wealth with trouble in thy house?
What boots success? 'Tis but an empty name.
Virtue contents her with sufficiency ;
We mortals own not what is called our own ;
We are but stewards of what the gods entrust,
Who, when they list, call the deposit back.
Come, if I set before thee these two things,
To be thy country's saviour or her lord,
Which wilt thou choose? Let yonder chief prevail,
Let Thebes go down before the Argive spear,

And thou wilt see this city subjugate,
And of our captive maidens many a one
Abandoned to the lawless conqueror's lust.
To thee so much. Now, Polynices, hear.
'Twas a fool's service that Adrastus did,
And folly brings thee here to storm this town.
If thou dost win this land, which heaven forbend,
Think how to Zeus thou wilt thy trophy rear,
How make thy offerings as a parricide,
How on thy spoils, beside our Inachus,
Write "Polynices from the sack of Thebes
These shields has dedicated"? Never, son,
Never be such renown through Hellas thine.
But if the day be lost, how can'st thou go
To Argos from a field heaped with her slain?
"Accursed, Adrastus," everyone will say,
"Has proved that match of thine; one bride has
wrought
The general ruin." Either way is loss;
Victor or vanquished, thou alike must fail;
Learn moderation, sons. Woe worth the day
When fool meets fool, and neither will give away.

THE PATRIOT'S SELF-DEVOTION.

The Prophet Tiresias announces that Thebes can be saved only by the sacrifice of Menœceus, Creon's son. Creon seeks to save him, but Menœceus patriotically resolves to give his life for his country.

LINES 977-1018.

MENŒCEUS.

Flee whither? To what city? To what friend?

CREON.

Where'er thou wilt be farthest from this land.

MENŒCEUS.

Trace thou my course ; I will thy bidding do.

CREON.

Get thee through Delphi.

MENŒCEUS.

Father, to what land?

CREON.

To the Ætolian.

MENŒCEUS.

And to what beyond?

CREON.

Unto Thesprotia.

MENŒCEUS.

To Dodona's fane?

CREON.

Right.

MENŒCEUS.

What protection can I look for there?

CREON.

The god will guide.

MENŒCEUS.

And how supply my wants?

CREON.

I will send gold.

MENŒCEUS.

Father, thou say'st aright.

Go thy ways then, I'll to thy sister hie,
Jocasta, that my foster mother was
When death of my own mother me bereft,
To bid her farewell, then I'll flee for life ;
Go quickly, do not thou delay my flight.

(*Exit CREON.*)

Damsels, how well I lulled my father's fears
With feigned discourse that I might gain my end.
He from our land would spirit me away,
And brand me coward, which in him old age

May well excuse, for me is no excuse,
If I betray the land which gave me birth.
I am resolved to save this commonwealth,
'To give my life a ransom for this land.
'Twere shame when men, bound by no oracles,
Forced by no fiat of the deities,
But marshalled to defend our city's towers,
Go with free hearts to face death under shield,
If I a traitor to my brother, sire,
And city, should slink cowardly away ;
Go where I would, reproach would follow me.
By Zeus who has his throne among the stars,
By bloody Ares, he that made of old
The race sprung from the earth lords of this land,
I will go mount the topmost battlements ;
Here will I die by my own hand, and fall
Into the dragon cave, as bade the seer ;
My country I will save, such my resolve.
'Tis no ignoble tribute that I go
To pay this State ; salvation, nothing less.
If each man freely would expend his store
For the promotion of the common weal,
Our States, from many a present evil free,
Would see before them times of happiness.

ORESTES.

ORESTES, having slain his mother, Clytæmnestra, in revenge for her murder of his father, Agamemnon, is pursued and driven mad by the avenging Furies. He is arraigned as a matricide, and the cause is tried by the Argive people in full Assembly. The debate is reported by a farmer from the country, who had witnessed it, to Electra, the sister of Orestes, whose fate is involved in that of her brother. The scene is Argos. The trial, held in the democratic form, and therefore hardly in keeping with the heroic age to which the legend belongs, may be compared with the trial of Orestes in the *Eumenides* of Æschylus before the sacred Court of Areopagus under the presidency of Athene. Orestes and Electra are condemned to die by their own hand, but are saved by the interversion of Apollo.

MADNESS AND SISTERLY LOVE.

LINES 211-315.

ORESTES.

O balmy sleep, the sick man's comforter,
Timely and sweet thy coming was, blest power,

That finely steeps pain in forgetfulness
And art misfortune's kindest deity,
How came I here? What brought me to this place?
My mind, distraught, remembers not the past.

ELECTRA.

How glad was I, dearest, to see thee sleep.
Shall I take hold of thee and lift thee up?

ORESTES.

Yes, yes, and wipe from my unhappy mouth
And from my eyes the clotted gout of foam.

ELECTRA.

Sweet is the labour. Never shall I tire
Of rendering thee a sister's offices.

ORESTES.

Support my frame with thine. Part from my face
My matted hair that I may see more clear.

ELECTRA.

Poor head, how squalid and unkempt thou art.
How long it is since thou hast known the bath!

ORESTES.

Lay me again upon my bed. My limbs
Are weak, and fail me when the fit is past.

ELECTRA.

To sickness ever welcome is the bed,
A mournful aid, but indispensable.

ORESTES.

Set me again upright and turn me round, —
The sick give trouble by their helplessness.

ELECTRA.

Would'st thou once more essay upon the ground
To set thy foot? In all things change is sweet.

ORESTES.

Yea, for it looks like the return of health,
Semblance is something worth, albeit unreal.

ELECTRA.

Give ear unto me, dearest brother, now,
While the Erinnyes leave thee sound of mind.

ORESTES.

Hast thou aught new to tell? If it be good,
Well, but if evil, more I cannot bear.

ELECTRA.

Thy uncle Menelaus has arrived;
His galleys anchored lie in Nauplia.

ORESTES.

How? Has hope dawned upon us? Is he here,
Our kinsman, so beholden to our sire?

ELECTRA.

Yes, he is here, — be sure I tell thee true, —
And he brings Helen home from captured Troy.

ORESTES.

He had been happier had he come alone ;
Bringing his wife with him he brings a curse.

ELECTRA.

A race of daughters 'Tindareus begot
Such as makes Hellas hate all womankind.

ORESTES.

Be not thou like them, choose the better part,
And be thy heart accordant to thy tongue.

ELECTRA.

Brother, alas ! there's trouble in thy look.
How soon the fit comes over thee again.

ORESTES.

Mother, for pity set not on thy son
These blood-stained Furies with their snaky locks.

ELECTRA.

Rest, my poor brother, quiet on thy bed,
Thine eyes see naught of what thy fancy sees.

ORESTES.

Phœbus, I shall be slain by these fell fiends,
These monsters, hideous priestesses of hell.

ELECTRA.

I will not let thee go, but hold thee fast,
And from thy frantic leapings hinder thee.

ORESTES.

Loose me ! thou'rt one of my Erinnyes,
And seizest me to cast me into hell.

ELECTRA.

Alas ! what aid or comfort can I find,
Seeing that heaven is our enemy ?

ORESTES.

Hand me the horn-tipped bow which Loxias gave,
Wherewith he said I should ward off the fiends
If they with madness should affright my soul.
Some goddess may be struck by mortal hand
Unless ye vanish quickly from my sight.
Hear ye not ? See ye not the feathered shaft
Leap from the string of the far-ranging bow ?
Ha ! ha !
Why do ye tarry here ? Go skim the air
And lay the blame on Phœbus' oracles.
Ah me !
Alas ! what madness am I breathing out ?
How came I to spring hither from my bed ?
After the storm again behold a calm.
Listen, why dost thou veil thy head and weep ?
I blush to make thee partner in my woes

And trouble with my sickness thy young soul.
 Let not thy brother's misery make thee pine.
 Thou didst but give consent, 'twas I that shed
 Our mother's blood. On Loxias rests the blame
 Who, having stirred me to this impious act,
 His promise kept in words but broke in deed.
 My father, had I asked him face to face
 Whether I should my mother slay, be sure,
 Would have implored me oft and earnestly
 On her that bore me not to draw my sword,
 Since he could never be restored to life,
 While I was doomed to all this misery.
 Uncover now thy face, my sister dear,
 And weep no more, though evil be our plight.
 Thou when thou seest me by despair o'erwhelmed,
 Shalt calm my spirit and its agony
 Assuage, and when thy turn of sorrow comes,
 My gentle words shall cheer and comfort thee.
 Such mutual aid beseems our mutual love.
 Now, sister mine, get thee into the house,
 Lie down and close thy wakeful eyes in sleep,
 Eat, and refresh thy body with the bath.
 For if I lose thee, or in nursing me
 Thou sickenest, I am lost ; to thee alone
 I look for help ; aid elsewhere have I none.

ELECTRA.

Nay, brother, at thy side I'll live or die.
 In thee I die or live. When thou art gone
 What is a woman? Can she save herself,

Reft of sire, brother, friend? Still, if thou bid'st,
I must obey. But stretch thee on thy couch
And give not way to frightful phantasies
That scare thee and that make thee start from bed.
For sickness that in fancy has its seat
Afflicts not less than the reality.

THE TRIAL.

The arraignment of Orestes and Electra for matricide before the Assembly of the People is recounted by a countryman who had witnessed it.

LINES 865-956.

THE COUNTRYMAN.

It chanced that from the country I had come,
Desiring of Orestes and thyself
To hear some tidings, for I loved your sire,
And was an old retainer of your house,
A poor man, but one loyal to his friends.
I saw a crowd in motion towards the height
Where Danaus, in old times, as legends say,
Gathered the folk to do Ægyptus right.
Seeing the crowd, I asked a citizen
What was the news in Argos, whether bruit
Of war had fluttered all the people thus.
“Nay,” he replied, “Orestes — see him there,
Approaching — is on trial for his life.”
I looked, and I beheld what grieved me much,

Pylades and thy brother side by side ;
 Orestes, downcast and with sickness worn,
 His comrade, with a brother's sympathy,
 Tending him as a nurse would tend a child.
 All being met, a herald rose and bade
 Whoso was willing to the question speak
 Whether Orestes, charged with matricide,
 Should live or die. Thereon Talthybius rose,
 Thy father's comrade at the sack of Troy,
 And spoke, as one still on the side of power,
 In trimming style ; much did he laud thy sire,
 But wrapping up invective with his praise,
 He blamed the precedent thy brother made,
 As hard on parents, while his countenance
 Beamed full on those that took Ægisthus' part.
 Such is the tribe ; still to the winning side
 Your herald skips, and this man is the friend
 Of all who office hold and rule the State.
 Next, noble Diomedes rose, and moved
 That neither of you should be put to death,
 But both be banished for religion's sake.
 Part of the assembly shouted their applause,
 But part dissented. Then a speaker rose,
 Of tongue unbridled, and with front of brass,
 An Argive, yet no Argive, thrust on us,
 Gifted with a power to lead the assembly wrong.¹
 This speaker moved that you be stoned to death.
 Though, when he thus advised to shed your blood,

¹Seven lines, deemed by some critics an interpolation, and certainly out of place, are here omitted.

'Twas Tyndareus, in truth, that set him on.
To answer him another speaker rose,
In presence mean, but with a generous soul,
One that eschewed much contact with the town,
A farmer, of that class that saves the State,
Unblemished, having led a blameless life,
And shrewd in grappling with an argument.
He moved to vote to Agamemnon's son
A crown for having venged his murdered sire
On an adulterous and an impious wife,
Who robbed the State of warriors, since to arms
No man would fly or march to fight abroad,
If those who stayed at home at ease had leave
To court and kiss the warrior's bedfellow.
The better part applauded. The debate
There ended. But thy brother then stepped forth
And said : " O men of the Inachian land,
For you, as well as for my sire, I struck,
Slaying my mother. If to murder men
Is woman's privilege, let us prepare
To die, or be the slaves of womankind.
Counter to wisdom herein will ye run ;
She that is slain died for adultery.
If ye put me to death for slaying her,
Law will no more have force, crime will abound,
And we had better all be in our graves.
His speech, though good, prevailed not with the crowd,
But that bad man, who moved to put to death
You and your brother, gained the larger vote.
Scarcely that he and thou should not be stoned

Orestes could obtain by promising
 That he would die this day by his own hand,
 And thou with him. Pylades from the court
 Escorts him weeping ; with them wailing goes
 A train of friends. A sight is near at hand
 Which will afflict thine eyes and wring thy heart.
 Make ready, then, the halter or the sword,
 For thou must die. Not thy illustrious line
 Can save thee, nor the Pythian oracle ;
 That oracle has sent thee to thy tomb.

IPHIGENIA IN AULIS.

IPHIGENIA, doomed to be sacrificed in order to appease the winds which are detaining the Grecian fleet at Aulis, pleads to her father for her life.

LINES 1211-1252.

IPHIGENIA.

Father, if Orpheus' magic power were mine,
So that enchanted rocks would follow me,
And whom I would my eloquence could charm
I'd put forth all my art. But I, alas,
No magic have, no talisman but tears.
So with this body, which my mother here
Bore thee, thy child a suppliant clasps thy knee.
O take not my young life, sweet is the light,
Bid me not change it for the shades below.
First I thee father called ; thou me first child.
First to thy knees Iphigenia clomb,
Hung round thy neck, and interchanged the kiss ;
Then wert thou wont to say, " Dear daughter mine,
Shall I some day see thee a wedded wife,
Prosperous and happy, as my child should be ?"
Then would I answer, clinging to thy beard

As now I cling to it with suppliant hand,
“And I, my father, shall I ever live
To see thee in my home a welcome guest,
And pay thy care with filial gratitude?”
All this do I remember well ; but thou
Rememberest naught, and now wouldst take my life.
For Pelops’ and for Atreus’ sake, thy sires,
Relent, and for my mother’s, that with pangs
Bore me, and now must other pangs endure.
The loves of Paris and of Helen, how
Concern they me, why should they be my bane?
Turn this way, father, give one look or kiss,
Something whereby I may remember thee
Among the dead, if my words move thee not.
Little canst thou, my brother, do to aid,
Yet join thy tears to mine and supplicate
Our father not to bid thy sister die ;
E’en babes are conscious of the coming ill.
See, without words, father, he prays to thee.
Have pity on me, then, and let me live ;
Two suppliants to thy mercy here appeal,
An infant he, I grown to womanhood.
Of all my pleadings this shall be the sum,
Dear to each mortal is the light of heaven,
Below is naught ; let madness wish to die ;
Better the lowliest life than noblest death.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS.

ACCORDING to one version of the legend, Iphigenia was not really sacrificed at Aulis, but was spirited away by Artemis, a stag being put in her place, and carried to the temple of that goddess in Tauris, in which she became a priestess. It was the custom here to sacrifice strangers who landed on the coast.

Iphigenia's brother Orestes and his friend Pylades are sent by Apollo to fetch away the statue of Artemis. They fall into the hands of the natives, after an affray in which the name of Pylades, but not that of Orestes, is divulged. They are brought to Iphigenia to be sacrificed. Her thoughts have just been turned to her Argive home and to her brother, by a dream which made her believe that Orestes was dead.

In the recognition scene Euripides has put forth all his art. Recognitions seem to have been favourite incidents with the theatrical public of Greece.

THE LOST BROTHER.

LINES 467-641.

IPHIGENIA.

(To ATTENDANTS.)

Due preparation for the rites divine
Be my first care. Unbind those strangers' hands ;
Chains misbecome limbs consecrate to heaven ;
Then go within the temple and arrange
All that is needful and that law enjoins.

(To ORESTES and PYLADES.)

Alas for her that bore ye, for your sire,
If ye a sister have, alas for her ;
Of what a noble pair of youths will she
Be now unbrothered. Heaven's decrees are dark,
On whom such haps may fall no man can say ;
No man foresees coming calamities,
For fortune baffles mortal scrutiny.
Whence, O unhappy strangers, have ye come ?
Long must it be since in this land ye were,
And long will be your exile there below.

ORESTES.

Spare us thy complaints, lady, whoe'er thou art,
And add not to our sum of misery.
I count him void of sense who, doomed to die,
Thinks by complaints to take the sting from death ;
Who, when his end is near and hope is none,

Gives way to vain laments ; he of one ill
Makes two, he draws on him the fool's reproach,
Yet 'scapes not death. Let fortune have her way.
Weep not for us, lady, too well we know
The sacrificial custom of this land.

IPHIGENIA.

Which is it of you two that owns the name
Of Pylades? This first I wish to know.

ORESTES.

My comrade, if it please thee to inquire.

IPHIGENIA.

Of what Hellenic city does he come?

ORESTES.

How will this knowledge, lady, vantage thee?

IPHIGENIA.

Say, are ye brethren, of one mother born?

ORESTES.

Brethren we are in love, but not in blood.

IPHIGENIA.

And what name did thy father give to thee?

ORESTES.

Our proper name were the Unfortunate.

IPHIGENIA.

That is no answer. Fortune dubbed thee thus.

ORESTES.

If I die nameless, I die undisgraced.

IPHIGENIA.

But why withhold thy name? Is it from pride?

ORESTES.

My body thou shalt kill, but not my name.

IPHIGENIA.

Wilt thou not tell me of what State thou art?

ORESTES.

It were but waste of words, since death is sure.

IPHIGENIA.

And yet what harm to grant me my desire?

ORESTES.

Argos my country is, well known to fame.

IPHIGENIA.

Is that indeed, stranger, thy native land?

ORESTES.

My birthplace was Mycenæ, once the proud.

IPHIGENIA.

What sent thee hence? Art thou a banished man?

ORESTES.

Freely, and yet not freely, came I here.

IPHIGENIA.

Yet is an Argive's coming glad to me.

ORESTES.

To thee, perchance, but not so glad to me.

IPHIGENIA.

Say, wilt thou tell me what I fain would learn?

ORESTES.

'Twere but a trifle added to my woes.

IPHIGENIA.

All men have heard, and thou hast heard, of Troy.

ORESTES.

Would I had not, nor even dreamed of it.

IPHIGENIA.

They say that it is fallen and desolate.

ORESTES.

Then they say truth ; it is as thou hast heard.

IPHIGENIA.

Has Menelaus brought his Helen home?

ORESTES.

Yea, to the bane of some most dear to me.

IPHIGENIA.

Where is she? I, too, at her hands had wrong.

ORESTES.

She dwells in Sparta with her former lord.

IPHIGENIA.

Hated of Hellas, not of me alone.

ORESTES.

I, too, have bitter memories of her loves.

IPHIGENIA.

And came the Hellenes home, as rumour told?

ORESTES.

Thou ask'st a thousand questions all in one.

IPHIGENIA.

I long to learn it all before thy death.

ORESTES.

Question me, if thou wilt; I'll answer thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Calchas the seer, did he return from Troy?

ORESTES.

He perished, as was in Mycenæ said.

IPHIGENIA.

Then heaven was just.¹ How of Laertes' son?

ORESTES.

He has not yet returned, but lives, they say.

IPHIGENIA.

O may he never see his country more.

ORESTES.

Thy curse is needless ; all goes ill with him.

IPHIGENIA.

The son of sea-born Thetis, lives he yet?

ORESTES.

No ; all in vain at Aulis did he wed.²

¹ It was Calchas that had doomed Iphigenia to be sacrificed in Aulis.

² Alluding to a legend according to which Iphigenia was brought by Ulysses and Diomedes to Aulis under pretence that she was to be married to Achilles.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twas a foul fraud, as they who suffered thought.

ORESTES.

Who art thou? Hellas is well known to thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Thence am I, but was lost in infancy.

ORESTES.

Then hast thou right to ask for news of it.

IPHIGENIA.

How of the great commander, fortune's child?

ORESTES.

I know of none that answers to that name.

IPHIGENIA.

There was one Agamemnon, Atreus' son.

ORESTES.

I cannot say ; lady, no more of this.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, prithee tell me and make glad my heart.

ORESTES.

The king is dead and dragged one down with him.

IPHIGENIA.

Dead? Woe is me. How came he to his end?

ORESTES.

What means that cry? Was he akin to thee?

IPHIGENIA.

Thought of his former state my pity moved.

ORESTES.

Sad was his death, death by a woman's hand.

IPHIGENIA.

Alas for her that slew, and him that fell.

ORESTES.

Lady, give o'er ; no further questions ask.

IPHIGENIA.

Yet one more. Lives the queen of the dead king?

ORESTES.

She lives not ; by her own son was she slain.

IPHIGENIA.

Distracted house ! What moved him to the deed?

ORESTES.

Vengeance on her who took his father's life.

IPHIGENIA.

Righteous, albeit unnatural, was his act.

ORESTES.

Yet his is not the righteous man's reward.

IPHIGENIA.

Did Agamemnon leave no other child?

ORESTES.

He left the maid Electra, her alone.

IPHIGENIA.

What say they of the damsel sacrificed?

ORESTES.

Naught say they save that she no longer lives.

IPHIGENIA.

Woe worth the sire who slew, and her who died.

ORESTES.

For a vile woman's sake her blood was shed.

IPHIGENIA.

Has the dead king in Argos left a son?

ORESTES.

He has ; a homeless wanderer o'er the earth.

IPHIGENIA.

Avaunt, then, lying dreams ! ye come to naught.

ORESTES.

And yet no flitting dreams could be more false
Than certain gods far famed for prophecy.¹

IPHIGENIA.

Lend me your ears. Something I have to say
That to you, strangers, and to me alike
May profit bring ; and what is good is best
When all concerned alike are satisfied.
Suppose I save thy life ; wilt thou consent
To take a message to my Argive friends,
And bear a letter which a captive once
In kindness wrote for me, considering
That it was not my hand that took his life,
But custom and the will of deity ?
But thou, for as I think thou'rt nobly born,
And know'st Mycenæ and my kindred well,
Shalt, by no weightier service than is done
In carrying these few lines, redeem thy life.
Parted from thee, thy friend must at the shrine
Be sacrificed, since so ordains the State.

ORESTES.

Thou hast well said save in one thing alone.
To my friend's death my heart can ne'er consent ;

¹ Four lines of the text, in which there is a hiatus, and two otiose lines of the Chorus have been here omitted.

The captain of this ship of woes am I,
He but a mate engaged by sympathy.
Shame were it if by his destruction I
Should favour court, and go myself scot-free.
Thus let it be : to him the tablet give,
Which he to Argos heedfully will bear,
And let me die. Of all base acts, most base
Is his who to their ruin leads his friends,
Himself escaping. And this friend is one
Whose life I value no less than my own.

IPHIGENIA.

O generous soul, sprung of a noble stock
Art thou, and worthy of the name of friend.
Whoever of my father's house survives,
Such may he be. And I a brother have,
Strangers, although I ne'er may look on him.
Since so thou willest, this thy friend shall bear
The letters, and the lot of death be thine ;
Such being, as it seems, thy fixed resolve.

ORESTES.

Who will perform the dreadful sacrifice ?

IPHIGENIA.

Myself ; the temple's ministry is mine.

ORESTES.

An office little to be envied, maid.

IPHIGENIA.

Necessity constrains, we must obey.

ORESTES.

Wilt thou, a woman, put a man to death?

IPHIGENIA.

I but with holy water sprinkle thee.

ORESTES.

Who, then, shall slay me, if 'tis meet to ask?

IPHIGENIA.

They are within to whom this act belongs.

ORESTES.

And what will be my tomb when I am dead?

IPHIGENIA.

A chasm wherein there burns a sacred fire.

ORESTES.

Would that my sister's hand could deck my corpse.

IPHIGENIA.

Vain is thy wish, poor man, whoe'er thou art,
Far from this savage land thy sister lives;
Yet as thou art an Argive citizen,

All shall be done for thee that I can do.
 Rich garments I will cast into thy grave,
 And oil upon thy burning corpse I'll pour,
 And sweets, that by the tawny mountain bee
 From flowers are gathered, scatter on your pyre.
 I go to fetch from forth the sanctuary
 My letter. Meantime, think no ill of me.
 Attendants, guard them well but chain them not.
 Perchance a glad surprise may be in store
 For some in Argos that are dear to me.
 And this my letter sweet assurance give,
 That one whom they accounted dead still lives.

THE RECOGNITION.

LINES 657-831.

ORESTES.

Pylades, does thy surmise jump with mine?

PYLADES.

I cannot tell ; your question puzzles me.

ORESTES.

Who is this maid? How like a Hellene she
 Inquired of us touching the war of Troy,
 'The army's homeward voyage, Calchas the seer,
 And the renowned Achilles ! How she shrieked

At Agamemnon's fate, and questioned me
About his wife and children. Argive sure
By race the maid must be, else would she not
This letter send, and curious be to learn
Of Argos' welfare, as it were her own.

PYLADES.

Thou hast forestalled me. I agree with thee,
Saving that what befell the royal house
Was known to all who converse hold with men.
But there was something else in her discourse.

ORESTES.

What was it? Make me partner of thy thought.

PYLADES.

For me to live and let thee die were shame ;
I shared thy voyage, let me share thy fate.
I shall be held a coward, stamped as vile
In Argos and through all the Phocian dales ;
And evil tongues, which still abound, will say
That I deserted thee and saved myself ;
Perchance, that while distraction filled thy house
I planned thy death, to grasp thy sovereignty,
And wed thy sister with her rich estate.
This is the stain from which my honour shrinks.
Therefore with thee I mean to breathe my last,
With thee be sacrificed, be burned with thee,
As should a friend that tenders his good name.

ORESTES.

Peace, peace, and let me my own fardel bear ;
I would not have two loads instead of one ;
The pain and infamy that thou dost fear
Are mine, if thee, the partner of my toils,
I leave to die. To one so scourged of heaven
As I am, not unwelcome is the end.
Thou'rt happy ; in thy mansion all is pure
And sound ; in mine all is defiled and sick.
Thee saved, and with my sister, whom I gave
To be thy wife, and children born of her,
My name survives. Nor is my father's house
Extinct and blotted from the minds of men.
Go, live, and in my father's mansion dwell.
To Hellas and to Argos famed for steeds,
Whene'er thou comest, I conjure thee, there
Make me a grave, build me a monument ;
And let my sister bring her tears, her hair.
Tell them that by an Argive woman's hand
A sacrificial victim I was slain ;
And do not to my sister prove untrue,
Because her father's house is desolate.
Farewell, then, thou, my ever best of friends,
My foster-brother, comrade in the hunt,
Thou that hast borne full half my load of woe.
Phœbus, that prophet god, has played us false.
To mask the failure of his oracles ;
He has from Hellas driven us far away ;
To him I gave myself at his behest ;
I slew my mother, now behold my doom.

PYLADES.

A tomb I'll build for thee, and never fail
To hold thy sister for my honoured wife ;
Dearer when dead than living thou shalt be.
Yet is there hope ; when things are at the worst,
Ofttimes, if so it chances, comes a change.

ORESTES.

Silence ! the words of Phœbus are but naught ;
The woman hither from the temple comes.

IPHIGENIA (*re-entering*).*(To the GUARDS.)*

Begone ; within the temple lend your aid,
In preparation for the sacrifice.

(To ORESTES and PYLADES.)

The folded tablet here I bring to you ;
Strangers, do ye now with attentive ear
Perpend my wishes. No man is the same
In danger's hour and in security.
I fear me that my destined messenger,
When he shall have left this land behind,
Will of me and my letter think no more.

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou then ? Whence thy perplexity ?

IPHIGENIA.

By oath I'd have him bind himself to bear
This letter unto Argos to my friends.

ORESTES.

Wilt thou in the same manner bind thyself?

IPHIGENIA.

To do or not to do what? Let me hear.

ORESTES.

To let him leave this savage land alive.

IPHIGENIA.

Surely. How else could he my errand do?

ORESTES.

But will your king permit him to depart?

IPHIGENIA.

I'll see to this, and see that he shall sail.

ORESTES.

(*To PYLADES.*)

Swear.

(*To IPHIGENIA.*)

And do thou the binding words dictate.

IPHIGENIA.

Say thou wilt give this letter to my friends.

PYLADES.

I to thy friends will this thy letter give.

IPHIGENIA.

Past the Cyanean rocks I'll see thee safe.

PYLADES.

What god shall be the witness of thy oath?

IPHIGENIA.

Artemis, in whose house I minister.

PYLADES.

Of mine the king of heaven, the awful Zeus.

IPHIGENIA.

For breach of oath what is thy penalty?

PYLADES.

Eternal banishment. And what is thine?

IPHIGENIA.

Never in Argos to set foot alive.

PYLADES.

One thing there was which I forgot to say.

IPHIGENIA.

That which is good can never come too late.

PYLADES.

This I would have excepted from my oath ;
In case the ship be wrecked and with my goods

The letter lost and I alone escape,
My oath shall not be to my prejudice.

IPHIGENIA.

Hearken to me : there are more ways than one ;
What in the folded tablet is inscribed
I will rehearse, that thou mayst tell my friends.
So are we safe. The letter if thou sav'st,
It without voice will say what it contains.
But if the writing in the sea is lost
And thou escap'st, my words with thee are safe.

PYLADES.

The gods and I alike are satisfied.
Tell me to whom at Argos I must give
This letter, and instruct me what to say.

IPHIGENIA.

Say to Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
Iphigenia, that in Aulis died,
Sent this, yet living, albeit dead to thee.

ORESTES.

Where is she? Can the grave give up its dead?

IPHIGENIA.

She stands before thee. Do not startle me.
Bear me to Argos, brother, ere I die,
From this wild land and from this bloody fane
Where I preside o'er human sacrifice.

ORESTES.

Where are we, Pylades? what shall I say?

IPHIGENIA.

*Or I will be a curse unto thy house,
Orestes. In thy memory grave that name.*

ORESTES.

Gods !

IPHIGENIA.

Why that cry? this touches me alone.

ORESTES.

'Twas naught. Proceed. My thoughts were turned
elsewhere.

IPHIGENIA.

*Say, Artemis put in my place a stag,
Which, taking it for me, my father slew
With his keen falchion, saved me thus from death
And brought me to this land. Such is the sense
Of that which in the tablets is contained.*

PYLADES.

O easy of fulfilment is my bond,
Happy thy pledge. I can refrain no more.
That which I promised I do now perform.
Behold, this letter from thy sister here,
Orestes, I deliver to thy hand.

(Gives the letter to ORESTES.)

ORESTES.

I take it. But I lay the writing by
While I embrace the substance of my joy.
O dearest sister, though I scarce believe
My senses, I must fold thee in these arms
To feed my love. O wondrous accident !

IPHIGENIA.¹

Stranger, it ill beseems thee to profane
The priestess' robe with thy unholy touch.

ORESTES.

O my own sister, offspring, as am I,
Of Agamemnon, shun not my embrace ;
The brother thou hadst lost is found, is here.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou art my brother? Trifle not with me.
He now in Argos or in Nauplia dwells.

ORESTES.

Thy kinsman, dearest lady, is not there.

IPHIGENIA.

Art thou the son of Spartan Tyndaris?

ORESTES.

And was by her to Pelops' grandson born.

¹ With Monk I give this to Iphigenia, not to the Chorus.

IPHIGENIA.

How say'st thou? canst thou give me proof of this?

ORESTES.

Yea, by my knowledge of our father's house.

IPHIGENIA.

Be thine to speak. I will the listener be.

ORESTES.

Once Atreus and Thyestes were at strife.

IPHIGENIA.

They were. It was about a golden fleece.

ORESTES.

Didst thou in tapestry present the tale?

IPHIGENIA.

Thy question does my memory closely touch.

ORESTES.

The darkened sun, was it by thee portrayed?

IPHIGENIA.

That, too, was pictured in my fine-wrought web.

ORESTES.

To Aulis was the nuptial water sent?

IPHIGENIA.

Sent by my mother. How could I forget?

ORESTES.

And thou didst to thy mother send thy hair?

IPHIGENIA.

To be my body's proxy in the grave.

ORESTES.

Proofs seen by my own eyes I now will give.
The ancient spear of Pelops, our great sire,
Wherewith he CEnomaus slew, and won
Hippodamia, the Pisatian maid,
Used to lie treasured in thy maiden bower.

IPHIGENIA.

O dearest brother, for thou dearest art,
I hold thee, my Orestes, far away
From thy own Argos, brother of my love.

ORESTES.

And I the sister whom I counted lost.

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